WORK WORK WORK

Labor, Alienation, and Class Struggle

MICHAEL D. YATES

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MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS
New York

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
available from the publisher

ISBN 978-1-58367-965-4 paper
ISBN 978-1-58367-966-1 cloth

Typeset in Minion Pro and DIN condensed

MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS, NEW YORK
monthlyreview.org

5 4 3 2 1

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As always, with all my love, to Karen Korenoski, the best companion I ever could have asked for.

Acknowledgments

This book owes its existence to my comrades at *Monthly Review*. Through them, I have become a member of a global community of radical intellectuals and activists. I began reading the magazine in 1969, and I submitted my first article to the editors in 1972. It was rejected, but Paul Sweezy sent me a handwritten and sympathetic letter explaining why it was declined. His response encouraged me to try again, and in 1975, a book review was accepted. In the early 1980s, I invited Paul and co-editor Harry Magdoff to visit the college where I taught and participate in a colloquium that we were organizing to discuss the political economy of the nation and the industrial heartland. They both came, and we became friends. Since that time, my connection to the magazine and Monthly Review Press has deepened, which has allowed me to publish and become part of something much larger than myself, an opportunity I almost certainly would never have gotten otherwise.

I have the deepest gratitude to everyone who has ever been an integral part of this revolutionary enterprise. So let me thank Paul, Harry, Leo Huberman (whom I never met but whose books and devotion to worker education have been a great influence), Harry Braverman (another I never met but whose remarkable book and

directorship of the Press are inspirations), Sybil May, Al and Judy Ruben, Hyacinth Anthonson, Martin Paddio, John Bellamy Foster, John Mage, John Simon, Brett Clark, Susie Day, Victor Wallis, Fred Magdoff, Intan Suwandi, Hannah Holleman, Jamil Jonna, Claude Misukiewicz, Scott Borchert, John Antush, Camila Valle, Rebecca Mansky, Andrew Nash, Ellen Meiksins Wood, and Colin Vandenburg.

Preface

This book is about work in class-based modes of production, primarily capitalism. Labor in other modes is discussed but mainly as a contrast to how work is done in capitalism. It is not a philosophical study of work in the abstract, which is interesting but beyond the scope of this book.[1]

What we can say here is that every society must produce at least the necessities of life. Such requirements are not eternally fixed; they obviously have a social component, which will vary over time and space. If we need to produce, we have to distribute what we make. There must be social rules for this. It could be simply equality, with each person getting a roughly equal share. It could be by the effort expended in production. It could be by the amount of money, which, in turn, could be based upon effort or property ownership.

In both production and distribution, the word "work" is bound to crop up. However, work is subject to a variety of meanings. Historically, that is, in societies with distinct social classes, its connotations are negative. Author and journalist Jeremy Seabrook writes that:

> Words indicating labour in most European languages originate in an imagery of compulsion, torment, affliction and persecution. The French word *travail* (and Spanish *trabajo*), like its English equivalent, are derived from the Latin *trepaliare*—to torture, to inflict suffering or agony. The word *peine*, meaning penalty or punishment, also is used to signify arduous labour, something accomplished with great effort. The German *Arbeit* suggests effort, hardship and suffering; it is cognate with the Slavonic *rabota* (from which English derives "robot"), a word meaning corvée, forced or serf labour.
>
> The English "work" has an Indo-European stem, *werg-*, via Greek *ergon*, meaning deed or action without punitive connotations; and Latin *urgere*, to press, bear down upon or compel. It is cognate with Gothic *wrikan*, to persecute, and Old English *wrecan*. Thus, in the word "work", violence is latent, and it appears in the form "wreak," when we speak of wreaking havoc or vengeance. "Toil" derives from Old French, meaning argument or dispute, fight and struggle.[2]

In these essays about work today, readers will see that I view it just as Seabrook tells us it has been understood historically. It is a profoundly alienating endeavor, and it must be abolished if human beings are to thrive, and the world is not to succumb to environmental disaster. We may have to stop using the word "work" itself, or perhaps employ it only to describe a forgettable past. We will always have to produce and distribute. We did this collectively, in an egalitarian manner, for most of our time on Earth as a natural part of life. There is no reason why we cannot do this again, although for this to happen, every institution of modern society will have to give way to something radically different. We do not have to "work," only to produce. If this book helps readers understand that these two words are not the same and that the first must give way to the second, it will have served its purpose. If further, it gets some people to ask why we cannot all perform meaningful labor that helps us develop our capacities

as thinking, acting, social human beings, it will have been a triumph.

— MICHAEL D. YATES
OCTOBER 2021

Introduction

The essays that follow are about work and those who perform it, almost always in the employ of people richer and more powerful than they. I got my first experience with work when I was twelve years old. I took a large paper route, with more than one hundred customers stretched over several miles of houses on hilly roads. It was 1958, and my pay was $6.00 every two weeks. I received additional money for collecting the monthly bills of those who bought the local newspaper and two Pittsburgh dailies. The U.S. minimum hourly wage in 1958 was $1.00. In two weeks, I worked for approximately twenty-five hours, making my hourly compensation twenty-four cents. Even as a young boy, I found this unacceptable. Knowing that no one else could do this route unless I trained them, I went to the newsstand whose owners were my bosses and demanded a raise. To my surprise, they agreed to a new wage of $9.00 every two weeks. This meant my pay was now thirty-six cents an hour, which was still far below the minimum wage. But it was high enough to keep me on the job. I kept at it for five years, enduring bad weather, nasty customers, vicious dogs, and eternally sore shoulders. It imprinted on my mind that work was hard and not particularly rewarding,

and most of all, that those who hired you got more out of your labor than you did.

Between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three, there were other jobs: night watchman at a state park, grading papers for a college teacher, selling insurance to college classmates, counseling at a summer camp for inner-city kids, and clerical work at the Pittsburgh Plate Glass plant where my father worked. In college and graduate school, I took an interest in labor unions and labor markets. However, I majored in economics, and the instruction in labor economics focused on the choices people make when selling their labor capacity. Prospective workers decided whether to invest in their "human capital"—mainly education and training—so that they would become more productive, compelling employers, as mainstream (neoclassical) theory dictated, to grant them higher wages. Employers were passive agents, with their choices dictated by a single-minded desire to maximize profits. If one set of employees earned more than another, it was because they had chosen to make the necessary human capital investments. A second choice was the amount of work people were willing to do. Some had high "leisure preferences" and would work less, while others had low preferences and would work more.

Thus, the outcomes in the labor market were the result of the free choices people made. And although there likely would be considerable inequality in outcomes, this was a mirage, in that those with higher wages had incurred costs to get them. In fact, the economists could show that over the long run, to give one example, a physician and a hospital orderly made exactly the same true wage, one that factored in the difference in the costs the two workers had undertaken to get their respective jobs.[1] When it came to labor unions, the economists declared that their main impact was to interfere with the free choices of the demanders and suppliers of labor. Unions forced wages up beyond the workers' productivity, compelling employers to hire fewer of them, generating socially undesirable unemployment. Unions, therefore, harmed the very persons they were presumed to be helping.

Two of my professors in graduate school did not subscribe to this way of thinking. The first, an "institutional economist," was part of a school that believed the market was but one institution affecting production and distribution. In his classes, we were shown that labor unions, one of modern society's important institutions, are critical in wage and benefit determination, and they do many other things: threaten nonunion employers enough to make them raise wages and benefits; reduce inequality overall and between men and women and white and nonwhite workers; improve workplace health and safety; help members to enforce protective legislation; make the enactment of such laws more likely, and give workers a voice in their workplace circumstances. The second professor, a radical Marxist economist, explained how profits are not a cost of production—the price that had to be paid for the services provided by the owners of capital, as the neoclassical theory argued—but the direct result of the exploitation of the working class.

The draft enacted by the war in Vietnam ended my stint as a full-time graduate student, but I managed by luck to get a teaching job at a branch campus of the University of Pittsburgh, where I was then taking graduate classes. It was located in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, famous for the great flood in 1889 and home to an important center of steel production, the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. In 1969, the year I was hired, there were more than 12,000 steelworkers laboring in the mills. I grew up in a factory town, and Johnstown was much like it, although considerably bigger.

When I became a teacher, it was soon apparent that I could not in good conscience teach what I had been taught. Of what relevance could a theory based upon the self-centered choices of autonomous individuals be to the daughters and sons of factory workers, which many of my students were? These first-generation college kids were on campus because of the collective actions of their parents and grandparents, who challenged the steel companies, coal mine operators, and assorted other business bigshots to

form unions and win the standards of living that made sending their children to college possible.

Among my first students were veterans of the war in Vietnam. Not a few stalwart neoclassical economists were ardent supporters of the carnage and mass murder at the heart of the U.S. government's strategy for winning the war, most notably the prominent advisor to President Lyndon Johnson, Walt Rostow. I don't remember who it was, perhaps Rostow, but one economist suggested that the war was causing Vietnamese to move to the cities, which he said led to national prosperity, and thus the carnage in the country ultimately would benefit them. Although some of the veterans supported the war, I could not fathom teaching them that economists believed that this conflict would ultimately benefit Vietnam's people economically or that the political system favored by Ho Chi Minh was an unadulterated evil.

College professors then had considerable control over the work they did. We chose our textbooks, the methods we deployed in the classroom, and the courses we taught and when. However, it was impossible not to notice that there was a defined hierarchy of authority. My yearly salary was not determined by me or through a collective bargaining agreement. This decision was made by my division chairman, the academic dean, and the college president. The latter two were little different and maybe worse than the owners of the newsstand or my father's foremen. They made arbitrary decisions, and the interests of faculty members did not have much to do with these. They had faculty allies who did some of their dirty work for them, like attacking any teacher who had the temerity to challenge the dean or the president at a faculty meeting. All teachers had an implicit rank above the rest of the campus workers, such as the secretaries, the custodians who cleaned the buildings and the student dormitories, the lower-level administrative staff, the cafeteria personnel, and the groundskeepers. They labored at low pay, obeying orders and carrying out tasks large and small.

It became evident to me that the college was primarily a

workplace, the presumed commitment to "higher learning" notwithstanding. Low pay and heavy teaching loads were more important to our administrators than excellent teaching and research skills. Our labor was what they wanted. And if this was the case, then I was a worker too, doing a job, just like almost everyone else on campus. Power ran from the top of a strict hierarchy to the bottom. As is common everywhere, those at the pinnacle of this pyramid were far removed from me. Their interests were not mine, and if I came into sharp enough conflict with them, they would exert their authority to get rid of me.

Once I conceived the campus as a workplace, I began to think about the nature of the labor I performed. And, since I came into contact with all the other workers at the college, I started to observe and think about their labor as well. First, there was the market of our labor, one among many such markets. The economists said that this market was like any other. There was a demand for workers and a supply for them. A higher wage led to a lower demand, while a lower wage gave rise to a higher one. By contrast, as wages rose, people would offer more labor for sale; as wages fell, the opposite would be the case. High wages would therefore generate a surplus of workers. In other words, unemployment, and then lower wages would be accepted, thus eventually eliminating the unemployment. If wages were low, the high demand would outstrip the low supply, and the excess demand would push wages up, reducing the demand but increasing the supply until the shortage ended. There was one special wage toward which pay tended, and this was the one at which the demand and supply were equal. This is called the "equilibrium wage."

This never seemed clear to me. Employers facing unions usually were forced to pay higher wages. But this didn't mean that workers lost their jobs once their pay went up. Quite the contrary. Many unionized companies boomed, hiring more workers at higher wages. And for some people, labor shortages seldom meant raises. The economists said that we could only earn more money if we became more productive. If we did something that would

add more to our employer's revenue stream than its costs, it would be profitable to hire more of us, increase our wages, or some of both. Education and training were our best bets to become more productive.

Probing this line of reasoning made me ask many questions. The college president was paid the most, but he seemed about as unproductive in any normal sense of that word as a man could be. The same went for the dean, a profoundly ignorant person. By contrast, the man and woman who cleaned the building that housed my office were always hard at work, very productive yet earning a pittance compared to the top administrators. I was working long hours preparing five classes with a couple of hundred students. But I was making less than I did as a summer employee at the glass factory. My starting salary, in 1969, was $7,200, which was low even then. There was an excess demand because the college's one economics professor had retired. The person hired to replace him suddenly withdrew when he got a better job offer. It was August, and the college was desperate to find someone to teach the four classes already fully subscribed. Unfortunately, I was more desperate than the college, having received three Army draft notices in the past year. The draft almost certainly meant Vietnam. I fought valiantly to keep out of the military, filing, with the help of an antiwar attorney in Pittsburgh, a class action lawsuit on behalf of all graduate students so we could keep our education deferments. One of my teachers said I should apply for the job at the Johnstown campus. I took his advice. In my interview, I told the dean I could teach just about anything. Within a week, I was offered the job. Given my dire circumstances, I accepted.

Second, there was the work itself. Once hired, what did workers do and under what conditions? Economists had little to say about this. The workplace was a mysterious black box that most economists simply chose to ignore. But without it, no society could survive. Just purchasing my ability to teach was no guarantee I would do so. And if I did, would I do so effectively? What would "effectively" mean, and to whom?

If I just stuck to the market, how would I answer a student's question about a worker who was fired for no apparent reason? The worker supplied, and the employer demanded. Wasn't that the end of the story? Should I just say, see your sociology professor? My grandfather was a self-taught industrial engineer who could be seen at the glass factory with his stopwatch timing those performing the many tasks that resulted in the production of plates of glass. His goal was to speed up the work, to produce more glass per hour and for a given wage, helping the company make more money. Why was he there if the market was the end of the matter? Was there a connection between markets and that black box?

To be a good teacher, you cannot simply repeat what you were taught, as if it is self-evident. You have to understand it so that you can make others grasp it, and you must be able to deal with questions from students, no matter how easy you think the material is to comprehend. Right away, in my first classes, I was struck by how ridiculous some of the precepts of mainstream economics were and how hidden the assumptions behind them. Students often say that economics is either inordinately boring or that it is too difficult. By the looks on their faces as I lectured mechanically about "supply and demand," "equilibrium prices," "constrained choice," the "production possibilities curve," and the tradeoff between "work and leisure," I was both boring them and speaking gibberish. Something had to be done.

By chance, one day, while roaming around the school library after another depressing day of classes, I discovered a magazine I had never heard of—*Monthly Review*. I read every article with excitement because they were clearly written and seemed to be aimed right at me. I found something I could use in class immediately. Over the following months, I found other sources, such as *Science & Society* and the journal of the recently formed Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE), the *Review of Radical Political Economics*. And during my first few years, I read several books that profoundly shaped my outlook. The most influential were Karl Marx's *Capital,* Volume 1, Paul Sweezy's *Theory of*

Capitalist Development, Paul Sweezy and Paul Baran's *Monopoly Capital*, and Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.

Not only did these magazines and books revolutionize my teaching; they also showed me how to connect the labor market to the workplace. Two concepts sum up this relationship: surplus value and control. Capitalism is a mode of production dominated by capitalists, those few whose land, raw materials, buildings, tools, and machines we need access to in order to survive. Most of us have little choice but to sell to capitalists our capacity to work. The power their productive property gives capitalists (property is productive, not they) means that they can pay us a wage lower than the value of what we produce with our labor. The difference in money terms is profit for the owner. If, instead, we measure this not in money terms but as the difference between the produced output and the labor input used up in this production—with each calculated by the work hours embedded in the goods and services bought with the wages and the labor time embedded in the output—we get what Marx called *surplus value*. This is the ultimate source of profits, and it is what the capitalists want, in ever-larger amounts as time passes.

Surplus value does not arise in the acts of buying and selling. Equal values are exchanged in competitive markets, which mainstream economists assume, but they deny that profits are a surplus, which is how Marx defines them. Instead, they result from what happens in the workplace. Workers produce a surplus value, and profits are realized as money when the output is sold.[2] Given that those who toil for wages might try to raise their pay to the extent that profits are diminished significantly, employers will obviously seek to prevent this from happening. If we think of what workers do—converting inputs into outputs—as a labor process, then the essence of capitalist management is to control this process. Understanding work in capitalism is then a matter of grasping how managerial control is implemented and enforced. I call the measures taken by capitalists control mechanisms. Historically, there have been many of these: centralization of workers in factories, the

detailed division of labor, mechanization, Taylorization, personnel management, including systematic hiring, management-by-stress, electronic surveillance, logistics, espionage, and blunt force, among many others. All of these will be discussed in this book.

It is important to recognize that in every class society, there is a war going on, a conflict between those who do the work and those who seek to control it. So, although the underlying themes of the essays in this book are the efforts of capital to accumulate surplus value and control the labor process, they are also about workers' resistance to these efforts. And either explicit or implicit in the essays is the belief that both capital and the working class itself ultimately must be abolished if we are to achieve a society free of alienation, one marked with substantive equality in all spheres of life.

I have resisted the authority and power of employers most of my adult life.[3] However, work in capitalist society is profoundly alienating. In the 1970s and '80s, we at the University of Pittsburgh failed four times to unionize the faculty. These losses, combined with the ever-tightening control by administrators over our work, deepened my alienation. Teaching had once been enjoyable, but now it was not. I found myself angry all the time. A therapist told me I should try to retire with dignity. I took his advice, and as soon as I could withdraw money from my pension—a generous retirement plan was the one good thing the university offered me—without tax penalty, I did. Life has been much better outside the degradation that is the capitalist workplace. And I only wish every worker could escape it.

Writing this book has been a painful experience. It has brought home all I know about work under the rule of capital. From the factory workers I grew up with, to my mother and her neighbors caring for homes, to my grandmother serving the rich, to my partner and my daughter working in daycare, to the farm workers I met in California, to the steelworkers in Johnstown, to the coal miners, construction workers, and truck drivers I have known, to the adjuncts in higher education, to my children doing hard and

body-destroying restaurant labor, to the many others I have only read about—all have filled me with both sadness and anger. We give up our lives so a few can be rich. And in the process, we split ourselves in two, one part for work, the other for everything else. We see those with whom we labor as competitors. We view the tools and machines that accompany our efforts as alien objects. Through our work and our spending, we consume ourselves and the natural world around us. I hope that those who read what I have written begin to think that enough is enough.

1

Take This Job and . . .

We read stories in the print media and see shows on television where working people say they like their jobs. The Conference Board, a business research group, found overall job satisfaction in 2020 at 56.9 percent, a marked increase from an all-time low of 42.6 percent in 2010.[1] In the television show *Undercover Boss*, a CEO wears a disguise and gets jobs in one of the company's workplaces. Often, in chain restaurants or retail outlets such as Dollar General, employees say they like their jobs. If we dig deeper, we find that matters are not so rosy. Still, survey findings do not reveal workforces boiling with rage and ready for radical change.

When we look later in this book at the jobs done by large numbers of people in the United States and the world, it seems fair to take job satisfaction data with a grain of salt. It would surprise me, for example, if there are many farmworkers, daycare providers, homemakers, logistic employees, adjunct professors, and the like questioned in the surveys. It would be astonishing if the more than 150 million child laborers in the world were happily employed.[2] Or if the 800 million farmworkers globally were content with their circumstances.[3]

This essay is a review of Ben Hamper's book, *Rivethead: Tales from the Assembly Line*.[4] Ben was an autoworker, and what he says about his jobs is telling, especially because there were still, in 2021, about 4 million workers in the manufacturing, repairing, and selling of vehicles in the United States alone.[5] The book also shows something of importance—that we become habituated to what we do. It comes to seem normal, part of life, and not likely to change. So, we make the best of it, and if asked, we say, well, it's okay, because to say otherwise would be too painful.

My father and Ben Hamper, the "rivethead" of his book's title, have a lot in common. Both spent good portions of their lives as factory workers, my father in a glassworks and Ben Hamper in an auto plant. Both became factory workers because it was almost predetermined that they would. All their relatives and friends were factory hands. As Ben Hamper puts it, "Right from the outset, when the call went out for shoprats, my ancestors responded in almost Pavlovian compliance. The family tree practically listed right over on its side with eager men and women grasping for that great automotive dream." The high pay and benefits sealed their fates. Both hoped for something better, but deep inside, they knew that the odds were long. The rivethead did get out, though not by choice. My father never did, despite the correspondence school courses and the plans to open a small store.

Hamper gives us a clear, darkly humorous picture of life on the line, telling us things that my father told me, though not in such a frantic and manic way. The work is hard and dangerous. "Ropes, wires, and assorted black rubber cables drooped down and entangled everything. Sparks shot out in all directions—bouncing in the aisles, flying into the rafters, and even ricocheting off the natives' heads. The noise level was deafening. It was like some hideous unrelenting tape loop of trains having sex." Not to mention the

extremes of hot and cold, lung-clogging dust, and toxic chemicals that would prevent most workers from enjoying their retirement. A foreman actually told my father, now disabled with emphysema (he died four years after Hamper's book was published), that if you could see the dust, it would not hurt you.

The work is unimaginably boring, something that the rivethead, at seven years old, had already discerned on a "family night" visit to the plant to watch his dad work:

> We stood there for forty minutes or so, a miniature lifetime, and the pattern never changed. Car, windshield. Car, windshield. Drudgery piled atop drudgery. Cigarette to cigarette. Decades rolling through the rafters, bones turning to dust, stubborn clocks gagging down flesh, another windshield, another cigarette, wars blinking on and off, thunderstorms muttering the alphabet, crows on power lines asleep or dead, that mechanical octopus squirming against nothing, nothing, nothingness.

The trick is to beat the clock in any way you can. Play "rivet" hockey. See how high you can kick packing boxes. Pretend you're going for the gold at the riveting Olympics. Be a practical joker. Best of all, "double up" if you can, that is, do both your own and your partner's job while he rests and vice versa. When this can be done for half the shift, each worker has four hours of freedom, to read, sleep, head for the bars, or go home.

The work is stressful. For a long time, my father was a glass examiner; he checked glass plates for flaws under high-intensity lights. Four cutters, working on incentives, depended on him for plates, and they were not happy if he was too slow. The boss was not happy if he was too careful. He coped with the stress by taking aspirin and smoking, several cigarettes burning simultaneously. Hamper and his shop mates smoke dope and consume prodigious quantities of alcohol, off and on the job. One guy runs a little business on the line, supplying half-pints of whiskey to his mates.

The boredom of the work, its profoundly inhuman quality, is

what makes it stressful. The descriptions of this work were themselves stressful to me; you can almost feel what it does to people. Some become zombies, like the old fellow who spends every day sleeping upright, leaning against the wall by the door to the john, or the man who answers "same old thing" no matter what you say to him. Not a few crack up completely; witness the rivethead's line mate who blowtorches his pet mouse and then mutilates himself to qualify for sick leave. A few workers become so habituated to the line that they hate to leave it, like the pensioners who sat in the park in my hometown wistfully staring at the plant gate across the street. Ultimately, Ben Hamper himself experiences panic attacks of such severity that he is forced to quit the factories and commit himself to a long mental rehabilitation.

These essays give the lie to what we might call work myths. First, workplaces are not happy places, and the bosses and the workers do not have much in common. Whether it be in auto plants, banks, fast-food joints, hospitals, post offices, or public schools, work is something to be endured, for the money, period. Surveys sometimes tell us that people are satisfied with their jobs. But satisfied compared to what? The lack of a job? An unknown alternative? I have been teaching union workers for years, and it is always the same story. You get pushed around; you count for little; your hours are long, your pay is low, and at any time, you might get put out on the street, just like the trash. True, auto workers made good money, bought houses, cars, and boats; went on vacation; and sent their kids to school. Yet their work took some of the shine from the money, and today this "good life" is gone, lost in the tidal wave of plant closings and union-busting. A lot of people ended up selling rabbits, humping at Taco Bell, or peddling Amway products like the hapless victims of Flint plant closings in Michael Moore's great film, *Roger and Me*. Amazingly, all this eludes our social scientists, who prattle on about the new work teams and cooperative management. Ben Hamper's worst job was his last one in one of the modern "Japanese-style" plants. He dubbed it "Gulag City."

Second, work itself, no matter how oppressive, does not engender class consciousness and solidarity. It is more likely to lead to such poor health and mental stress that coherent thoughts and actions are difficult. Historians David Montgomery and Jeremy Brecher suggest that workers eagerly debated great questions during the many mass strikes before the Second World War. Who should run the factories? Who should lead the nation? My father told me that after the war, his factory was alive with talk of politics. Not so in modern Flint, where meaningful discussions are far outnumbered by talk of booze, sex, sports, and hunting.

The consciousness that does develop is of the "us versus you" variety. Ben Hamper and his comrades take a negative pride in the very meaninglessness of the work they do and dislike those who don't or won't or can't stand up to it; a kind of self-hatred turned into contempt for outsiders. My auto worker students love to bait me, but often in a wholly negative way. Who am I to talk about work? Who am I to criticize GM? (!) While I was in college, they were in Vietnam. Aren't teachers overpaid? I do not know what it is like to work the line. But I do know why economic depressions occur, why there is so much poverty, what Keynesian policies are, how the Federal Reserve works, why free trade agreements stink, and so on, and they do not know these and a lot of other things. Many of them believe that the media cause depressions, that welfare is the root of all evils, that the trouble with sports is that there are too many Black players, that the Japanese are innately evil. I slog on, but there is more work to be done than radicals might think.

Third, unions, as currently constituted, offer working people a very partial victory. Ben Hamper says little about the United Auto Workers; the union isn't exactly a daily, felt presence on the shop floor. In the old plants, the union made it hard to fire workers and made it possible for them to resist and sometimes to defeat the worst management abuses. But since the radicals were expelled long ago, it has not stood for anything except higher pay and some job security, and today it cannot deliver these. In the newer plants,

it is firmly in bed with the companies, pushing the labor-management cooperation schemes that Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter in their book *Choosing Sides* more accurately call "management by stress."[6] There are hopeful rumblings among the rank and file in the UAW and many other unions. Still, it is a sorry state of affairs when a book like Ben Hamper's has so little to say about what most people consider to be one of the nation's greatest unions.

Ben Hamper has written a "riveting" account of work, devoid of veneer and true to life. He has done so despite alcoholism and mental illness; no doubt writing is the one thing that kept him alive. In the face of this achievement, it is hard to criticize. Still, I expected something more from him. He is aware of the insanity of the whole rotten work system. A mascot dubbed "Howie Makem" prowls the factory in a cat costume to promote quality. GM chairman Roger Smith tells his proles that they will be better off once thousands of them are put out on the street and scores of plants closed. Yet, he is not much aware of the world outside the shop, outside Flint, Michigan. This is the concern of intellectuals like Hamper's friend Michael Moore, not of shoprats. Hamper admires Moore, who has encouraged him to write about his work, but he won't make much effort to bridge the gap of consciousness between them. Why not?

This failure, even unwillingness, to push his class consciousness forward when he could disappointed me. Maybe it is too painful to do so. Maybe the unions have failed so utterly to create a working-class ideology that would force workers to ask the right questions and struggle toward the answers that it is no longer possible to imagine a new world. No doubt radicals have failed workers too, either ignoring them for the pleasures of theoretical debate or trying to become one of them so hard that they forgot that work in this society destroys the human spirit.

If we are ever to liberate ourselves, we must reinvent work. Either we will convert the daily hell that is work today into something that connects us to other people and the world around us, or we will descend further into the alienation engulfing us. Ben

Hamper gives us no illusions about work. It is a soul-destroying, lethal experience. But where is the way out?

2

Labor Markets: The Neoclassical Dogma

A central feature of the capitalist economy is the market in labor. Unlike in precapitalist societies, in ours the capacity of human beings to work has become a commodity like any other, bought and sold in labor markets. Mainstream economists embrace this fact, assuming that it is natural and has always been the case. They never ask how such markets came to be. If they did, it would be difficult for them to assume, as they do, that the buyers and sellers of labor power face each other as equals in the marketplace. They imagine that prospective workers have given productivities, determined by the investments in their "human capital," mainly education and training, which they have freely decided to make. Employers make their hiring decisions based on comparing the money value of what the workers can add to company revenues and the costs of hiring the workers, such as wages and training. The laborers decide whether the wage offer is high enough to overcome their desire for leisure time. The market forces a match between the choices of the employers and those of the workers. No one is exploited because each has made a self-interested choice, and the economists assume that whatever happens is the consequence of perfectly rational decisions.

If everyone then ends up in a maximal position, it follows that from society's perspective, a social optimum is achieved.

For neoclassical (mainstream) economists, the central feature of capitalism is markets. These are analyzed through the theory of demand and supply by individuals seeking to maximize profit if discussing employers or utility (subjective satisfaction, well-being) if examining consumers or employees. The full explication of market theory yields predictions, and these can then be tested against actual outcomes. However, the neoclassical theory gives such wondrous results that, for many economists, no tests are needed. The good outcomes that would result if everyone acted as the theory says they should give us the obvious conclusion that we should organize society to ensure that we all behave according to the theory's precepts. I put it this way in a book I wrote:

> The notion that a social optimum can be achieved by allowing each person to act in a self-interested manner when making economic choices was put into a famous maxim by Adam Smith, author of an early economics classic, *The Wealth of Nations*: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer and the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest." Society as a whole benefits when each person looks only to his and her individual gain. We do not intend that society benefit, but that is the result that the market gives us. The market harnesses our "greed" and turns it into a gain for society.[1]

Testing seems redundant to many economists, and few mention the need for it to their beginning students. The unfortunate thing is that some on the left believe that markets are not inherently destructive to social well-being. They favor what they call "market socialism," which will embrace markets but control them in the people's interest.

Ben Kunkel, the writer, founder of the magazine *n+1*, and author of a book on radical political economy, said in a recent interview

> So at least in theory, you could have a market economy where everybody receives the same income. It might not work for other reasons—because there would be, I suppose, no incentive at all to do a better job than someone else in terms of what you received in compensation—but at least in theory, there's no incompatibility between an absolute equality of income, and absolute freedom in terms of how that income's spent.[2]

This chapter will make clear both the basics of mainstream economic theory and the multiple problems that come along with it. And it should allow readers to evaluate Ben Kunkel's remarks critically. The essay below is built around a commentary on a film by Mary Filippo.[3]

Mary Filippo's 58-minute film will interest anyone who has taken a college-level course in economics, especially those who were baffled by the professor's pronouncements but too insecure or embarrassed to ask obvious questions. In 2004 Filippo began to audit economics classes hoping that she could "learn something about globalization": Does it really help people in developing countries? What are its downsides? She did not learn these things. She says, "What I found in these courses was instead a difficult to understand presentation of the economy through graphic models."

Throughout the film, she shows several purveyors of the wisdom of the "dismal science" making statements, with a straight face and with the discipline's ubiquitous graphs, that seem ridiculous to any thinking person. [4] These are offered without evidence, and when Filippo asks for proof, they resort either to silence or subterfuge.

They draw supply-and-demand graphs and assume that what they show is obvious. If prices are too high, competition in the market will miraculously lower them; if prices are too low, the same force will drive them up. In the end (whenever this might be; the economists don't know how long it will take), prices will always wind up at just the point at which the amount demanded equals the amount supplied. This is presented as an ideal situation, one that is, in effect, socially optimal. As some critics who participate in the film note, the demand curve represents those who might desire a product and have the money to pay for it. When this is pointed out to Gregory Mankiw, author of an economics textbook that has made him millions of dollars, he said that the need for cash to make demand effective is taught in a subsequent course!

In another context, Mankiw, surely as callous and simple-minded a man as ever obtained a PhD, says that to ask questions about inequality, poverty, and so forth, reflects value judgments, which, by definition, are not scientific. They are beyond the purview of the economists but rather are the stock-in-trade of journalists, for whom, as his words and demeanor imply, he has a low opinion. He argues that the objectivity and value-free nature of economics is partly due to its use of mathematics to buttress its theory, the idea being that since mathematics is value-free, any subject that uses it must be value-free as well.

The claim that economics is a science is one of the greatest frauds perpetrated by the adherents of any branch of learning. A professor who taught at the university I attended in graduate school said without irony that economists were physicists of society. This claim would surely have generated howls of laughter had there been any physicists on hand when he uttered this nonsense. Real scientists know that although the starting part of scientific investigation is a hypothesis based upon certain assumptions, this is not the end point. The logic of the assumptions is worked out, typically with mathematics, to generate the hypothesis. But then the predictions generated in the hypothesis must be tested. Scientists have devised many ingenious experiments to test their hypotheses.

When other researchers replicate their experiments and obtain the same results, then our confidence in these results is deepened. If anomalies begin to appear at a future time, then scientists have to return to the drawing board to explain them. Sometimes, entirely new theories come into being as a consequence, as when Einstein explained anomalies in Isaac Newton's physics of the universe with a new theory, that of general relativity.

Economists cannot typically perform the kind of experiments scientists do. The social world isn't a laboratory where the variables being examined can be controlled while the scientist records what happens when a change is introduced. Occasionally, the social world throws up what we might call "natural experiments" in which, for example, two circumstances are pretty much alike except for one variable. Then differences in social outcomes might legitimately be thought of as the result of this one difference. When such natural experiments are not available, other, more indirect methods can test predictions. These must be employed with great care to avoid circular reasoning.

Unfortunately, mainstream economists, especially when teaching the classes that Mary Filippo audited, never discuss testing. They do mention the assumption that underlies their prediction-generating model. The key term used is "the market," which is assumed to be the most important social institution that economists must study. In the market, buyers and sellers of both outputs and inputs meet. Each buyer and seller is assumed to be motivated to act in the market, that is, to buy or sell, solely out of self-interest. Each is assumed to be autonomous, disconnected from every other market actor, and to base decisions about buying and selling only upon an internal selfish calculus. The sellers of outputs (for example, the owners of an automobile corporation), who are also the buyers of inputs (such as labor), make every business decision with the sole aim of maximizing profits. The buyers of outputs (for example, the purchasers of the automobiles), who are also the sellers of inputs (such as labor), want only to maximize their well-being or "utility," as the economists put it. Suppose, then, we

trace out the logic of the self-interest assumption. In that case, we get certain predictions, shown to beginning students through the use of demand and supply graphs, shown repeatedly in *My Mis-Education in 3 Graphics*.

Let's look at some examples of the hypotheses we can derive from our assumption. First, the model predicts that an increase in the minimum wage will increase unemployment and reduce employment. The mainstream economists in the film take this as an article of faith, with no proof needed. One of them interviewed by Filippo, the late George Borts, proclaims that unemployment results from wages being too high. But because of the nefarious actions of governments that set minimum wages and perfidious labor unions that force employers to pay decent wages, wages don't fall. This professor, along with most other diehard neoclassical economists, would abolish minimum wage laws and, no doubt, unions as well. Then wages would fall, and unemployment would disappear. He says on camera that he doesn't care how low wages might drop, even well below a dollar an hour. Borts has no answer to the question of how anyone could live on such an amount. Showing that he is just as callous and obtuse as Mankiw, he proclaims to Filippo that he finds it "bizarre" that she wants higher minimum wages and stronger unions. Bizarre! Think about that, coming from a person with a chaired professorship at Brown University. Pity his poor students, although some studies indicate that those who take an economics course become more selfish.[5]

The faith in the model of Mankiw and Borts notwithstanding, there is excellent evidence, gathered by many empirically minded economists (those who eschew orthodox theory for sophisticated analyses of the data), that raising the minimum wage either has no effect on employment or, in fact, increases it. Ever since David Card, who in 2021won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics, and Alan Krueger eviscerated the mainstream view in their book *Myth and Measurement: The New Economics of the Minimum Wage*, it has become apparent that there is good reason to raise

the minimum wage, even though businesses and their shills in the economics profession think this is a bad idea.[6]

We know that inequality in income and wealth has grown to record levels in the United States over the past forty years.[7] Once again, Professor Mankiw, who served as an economics advisor to that great progressive George W. Bush—how anyone can claim to do value-free science and work for any president is beyond me—either appears oblivious to the fact that this is a grave social problem or explains it away in a simplistic manner. According to the theory, different incomes simply reflect the different "productivities" of the income recipients. There are too many things wrong with this notion to enumerate them all here. The mainstream model says that when markets are in equilibrium, with prices and quantities at the point where demand and supply curves intersect, the wage income that a worker earns equals the money value the worker adds to the employer's revenue from the sale of its product. Therefore, for employees to deserve higher wages, they must become more productive. Otherwise, an employer will suffer losses if a higher wage is paid, with the consequence that workers will have to be discharged and less product will be produced, to the detriment of society. You might ask: How do we measure productivity? What workers produce hinges on many factors: What kind of equipment will they have at their disposal? With which workers will they be laboring, given that in any modern workplace, what is produced is invariably a collective effort? How might they become more productive?

I remember thinking about my grandmother. She once worked for rich people in New York City. She labored day and night cleaning, cooking, taking care of children, ironing, and so forth. I think she was highly productive. Her employers, on the other hand, seemed not to do much at all. But they had lots of money, and she had almost none. How might Mankiw explain this? They had wealth—stocks, bonds, real estate, all of which generate income in dividends, capital gains, interest, and rent. Was it the ownership of these and the income obtained from them that made them

productive? It would seem so, according to the theory. Now, if Grandma became still more productive, by, say, learning how to cook a complicated meal (her superiors didn't eat hotdogs and potato chips for supper) while simultaneously rocking the baby to sleep and ironing dresses, would she have been given a big raise? I doubt it. I imagine that Mankiw would argue that her employers were taking risks by purchasing risky, venture forms of wealth or that they were simply being rewarded for saving money now so that they would have higher income and wealth in the future. Suppose that Jeff Bezos, the world's richest person, went into a coma, which would mean that his productivity would be zero. Wouldn't he keep right on collecting vast amounts of income, which his managers would then convert into still more wealth? Maybe them that's got is them that gets, and productivity has nothing to do with it.

What is more, the theory tells us that should workers become more productive, employers must either pay a higher wage or hire more workers, or profits will suffer. A look at overall U.S. productivity data—basically total output divided by something like total hours worked—indicates that for decades, productivity in the economy has risen considerably, but wages have not, as Filippo shows in her film. This flies in the face of the neoclassical predictions, though economists seem not to have noticed.[8]

Let's give the economists the benefit of the doubt and agree that wages are productivity-dependent. Most economists would admit that productivity cannot be measured directly. So, they use proxies for it, the most common being education and experience. Workers with more schooling are presumed to be more productive, although I know of no direct evidence proving this. Heterodox economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis showed in their book, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, that students are more likely to be rewarded with good grades, and workers are more likely to get high ratings from supervisors, not because they are creative and knowledgeable but because they are perseverant and identify strongly with their school or their bosses.[9] However, the economists reason that because those with more schooling

have higher wages, they must be more productive. That this is circular reasoning seems not to matter. There are other explanations of why more schooling leads to higher incomes, but these are dismissed because they have nothing to do with productivity. I used to tell my students that it might well be that they will make more money someday simply because they were willing to sit in truly uncomfortable chairs and give back to the teacher exactly what the teacher said for four years. It wouldn't be because they had all become magically more productive, though an employer, fed the same propaganda as the students, might assume they are.[10]

We can combine product and input (factor) markets in another example of the model's predictions. Suppose that all markets are in equilibrium; that is, demand and supply are equal in all product and factor markets. Now, imagine that consumers would like to have more of a particular output—say, coffee. The economists assume people always want more and more of most things, and economics is really the science of making choices, given that while we want more, we may be constrained by our incomes. In this case, imagine that there has been an increase in consumer incomes, leading them to want more coffee. In terms of the supply and demand graphs, this is shown as a rightward shift in the demand graph, indicating that at every price, more will be purchased. The price of coffee will rise, and, given that the new equilibrium (intersection of the old supply graph and the new demand graph) shows a greater quantity of coffee supplied, profits must increase. Then, the economists argue that over the long run higher profits will attract new firms to this market, shifting the supply graph to the right as well, raising supply but also forcing prices and profits down. In fact, the theory claims, supply will rise until profits are reduced to zero.

Zero, you say? When filmmaker Filippo presses Professor Mankiw on this, he says that economists don't conceive of profits as ordinary people do. Profits may appear to be zero, but this is because what the economists think of as profit is really a cost of production, just like wages and raw materials. The cost is an

"opportunity cost," that is, what the capitalist gives up by going into business in the first place. The money laid out by a business firm could have been put into an asset with a guaranteed return, such as a federal government bond. If, on average, such bonds yield an interest of 3 percent, then what an accountant would count as profit will be reduced to zero by competition. But there will still be economic profit, namely the 3 percent. However, this isn't really profit but a cost of doing business.

It might seem strange to consider profit as a cost of production. And, indeed it is. As one of the critical economists says in the film, why would a businessperson go to all the trouble of starting a business, only to find that he could have done as well over the long run by buying that government bond? The unreality of this truly is mindboggling. Adam Smith said in *The Wealth of Nations*, published 246 years ago, that those engaged in business never meet with one another without discussing ways to restrict competition by implementing barriers to the entry of new firms. This is done through monopolies (one firm controlling a market) and oligopolies (a few firms doing the same). If such arrangements are successful, the entire competitive theory falls to pieces because profits will not fall, nor will prices. Mankiw tells Mary Filippo that monopoly power is greatly exaggerated, though, not surprisingly, he offers no proof. As you might guess, there is plenty of evidence contrary to what he believes.[11]

The final part of the film covers the development of macroeconomics, the study of the overall economy rather than individual markets. The split between the analysis of particular markets and the entire economy came about because of the failure of the market approach to explain the Great Depression of the 1930s. Macroeconomic theory is most associated with John Maynard Keynes. Although the film does not make this clear, the neoclassical model predicted that long-term involuntary unemployment (a curious phrase because why would anyone needing money to live choose to be unemployed?) is impossible in a market economy. Unemployment would put in motion a set of chain reactions,

such as falling wages, prices, and interest rates, that would cause the economy to reverse course and, over the long run, eliminate unemployment. Keynes and others argued that this wasn't likely to be the case. Only if some outside force, such as the government, consciously stimulated the demand for goods and services through its own spending would a severe downturn come to an end. Keynes famously quipped, in a pointed jab at the neoclassical notion that economic problems will always disappear in the long run, that "in the long run, we are all dead."

In the film, the critics of the mainstream view point out that the Keynesian position is correct. But rather than admit this, neoclassical true believers have managed to incorporate Keynes's insights into their demand and supply analyses to eradicate what Keynes was trying to tell them. However, the discussion of this in the film is unsatisfactory, jumping all over the place and, I would guess, confusing viewers unnecessarily. Suffice it to say that today Keynes is not much taught, and markets have taken over the textbooks again.

Overall, the film is well done, and by letting neoclassical economists indict themselves and their ideas, it makes its points without becoming heavy-handed. Yet, two shortcomings stick out in this reviewer's mind. First, most of the on-camera critics assembled by Mary Filippo as counterpoints to Mankiw, Borts et al. do indeed make clear just how awful mainstream economics is, as are the textbooks students must buy to help them learn it. However, these economists make mainly liberal, not radical, critiques. Only John Bellamy Foster, the editor of *Monthly Review* and a professor at the University of Oregon, gets to the heart of the matter: capitalism is a system focused only on the exchange value of goods and services. It ignores what is most important—their use value. The distinction between the two is central to Karl Marx's profound analysis of economics as professed back in the mid- to late-1800s, and now, in 2022. Liberal economists, most notably Keynes, often have sharply and intelligently opposed the standard wisdom taught by mainstream economists, from Irving Fisher and George Stigler to Milton Friedman and Gary Becker. But they have no real grasp

of capitalism either, and this they share with their conservative, libertarian colleagues.

Consider Nobel Economics Prize winner and former head of the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz. During the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011, he said this to the Occupiers in Manhattan:

> You are right to be indignant. The fact is that the system is not working right. It is not right that we have so many people without jobs when we have so many needs that we have to fulfill. It's not right that we are throwing people out of their houses when we have so many homeless people. Our financial markets have an important role to play. They're supposed to allocate capital, manage risks. We are bearing the costs of their misdeeds. There's a system where we've socialized losses and privatized gains. That's not capitalism; that's not a market economy. That's a distorted economy, and if we continue with that, we won't succeed in growing, and we won't succeed in creating a just society.

Not long after Stiglitz spoke, I wrote this about his statement:

> Almost every sentence after the first one is wrong. The sentences about the unemployed and the homeless would be fine on their own, but unfortunately, they follow the one that says that "the system is not working right." How so? It is working exactly as capitalist systems work. They have always been marked by poles of wealth and poverty, periods of speculative bubbles followed by recessions or depressions, overworked employees and reserve armies of labor, a few winners and many losers, alienating workplaces, the theft of peasant lands, despoiled environments, in a word, the rule of capital. Losses are always socialized, and gains are always privatized. It is impossible to create a society that is both just and capitalist.[12]

Stiglitz, like Mankiw and Keynes himself, for that matter, cannot imagine a society that is not fundamentally capitalist, and he only

wants capitalism to be fairer and more just. The same can be said of most of the liberals interviewed for the film and about such liberal stalwarts as Paul Krugman, columnist for the *New York Times* and a Nobel Economics Prize winner. Paraphrasing Karl Marx, radical economist and late editor of *Monthly Review* Harry Magdoff called these economists "prizefighters for capitalism."[13]

Second, neoclassical economists have perpetrated a bold lie, a clever trick in effect, one transparent to those who have examined it with a radical eye but believable by those who have not. Here is how I described the legerdemain deployed by the architects of the economic "science":

> The main trick used by professors of economics is to draw their pupils into a make-believe world and then convince them that this world is a good approximation of the real world, enough so that the world in which we live can be studied effectively by analyzing the fantasy world. In fact, the professors also claim that this pretend world is a good approximation not just of the world of today but of the world of any time in human existence, so that any society can be studied through its lens. To them the neoclassical theory is as universal and timeless as the theories of Einstein. They see economics as the physics of the social world.
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> The economists take their analysis one step further. The hypothetical world of their theory is in all important respects an ideal world, the best we could have. Therefore, any deviation from it that we observe in the world of existence should, in the interest of human happiness, be eliminated.
>
> It is a curious thing to say that something should change in the living world because it does not conform to a world which does not . . . and could never, exist. For example, a minimum wage set by the government interferes with the efficient operation of the ideal world by causing a loss of employment. The neoclassical economists then conclude that we should not have a minimum wage in the actually existing world. Or, the economists conflate the ideal economy of their theory with the real economy, which

> is capitalism. Since the imaginary economy is good, so too is capitalism. It is no wonder that economics has been compared to religion. To hold such views requires a strong faith.[14]

One would think that if economics really were a science, then the failure of its predictions to stand up to empirical scrutiny would doom it as surely as the observations and mathematics of the early physicists and astronomers laid to rest the notion that the sun revolved around the earth. How has this not been the case? We must understand that stating the obvious fallacies of neoclassical economics and the manifest shortcomings of its proponents will not weaken its hold. It will only collapse if a significant number of students and economists ally themselves with working men and women—those who can and must be the agents of radical change—teaching them, writing for and with them, becoming one of them in their workplaces. Only then is it likely that Mary Filippo could take an economics class and learn what she wanted to, something about globalization. Does it really help people in developing countries? What are its downsides?

Addendum to the Review of Mary Filippo's Film

Markets act as a veil, hiding the face of the system. They are impersonal mechanisms, which allows us to use them without knowing what is underneath. We buy goods and services and are thereby dependent on those who produce our food, clothing, shelter, and services of every kind. However, we simply exchange money for them. And as the Romans said, *Pecunia non olet*. Money has no smell. Employers say that they pay the market wage. If it is too low for survival, that is no fault of the boss. We can't be concerned about the conditions of labor endured by those who make what we buy. Yet, how is it imaginable that a good society can be constructed on the basis of markets for everything imaginable? Worse yet, isn't it obvious that markets benefit those who have the most money, and there never has been and never will be a capitalist

system in which money is not unevenly distributed? How would it be possible to argue, as Ben Norton does, that markets are compatible with equal incomes? They are not. Nor are labor markets consistent with unalienated lives. All markets are built around individualistic, self-centered behavior, impersonal in its callousness to what goes on behind the veil.

3

Work Is Hell

When we sell our labor power to an employer, the latter only gets our capacity to work, not our actual labor. The capitalist, therefore, must convert potential labor into the effort that will produce whatever it is the business sells. This is no easy task. Not only must certain changes have taken place in the larger society, such that people are compelled to sell their labor power, but workers must feel under a compulsion to toil at the direction of a hostile force.

Before capitalism, markets in labor were either nonexistent or of limited scope. In the feudal mode of production that preceded the advent of capitalism in Europe, most inhabitants were peasants living on feudal estates called manors, which were ruled politically and economically by lords. There were also small farmers and gatherer-hunters living outside the manor's confines. There was trade, but it typically was not done according to market principles. There were also towns where various kinds of production occurred, organized in feudal guilds, with prices set by custom and tradition. Illustrating the difference between feudalism and capitalism were the proscriptions laid down by the Dominican friar and philosopher Thomas Aquinas, who

developed what we might call the ideological underpinnings of this mode of production. He said that prices had to be "just." They must only cover costs and not include a profit. He also declared that charging interest on loans was to commit the sin of usury.

Capitalism brought about the gradual destruction of the feudal mode of production. The nobility in England, for example, under the rule of the dominant lord, King Henry VIII (1509–1547), gained control of the manors of the Catholic Church, which Henry subdued in his war with the Pope over marital matters. The king confiscated Church lands, which comprised roughly a third of the arable land of England. For centuries, peasants (serfs) had tilled their fields and those of their lord, paying customary rents in both output (a portion of their crops and livestock) and labor on the manor fields explicitly reserved for the lord. Part of each manor was "common land," reserved for grazing animals, planting crops, gathering firewood, hunting game, and fishing. Serfs had certain customary rights, bound up in an unequal set of mutual obligations between them and their lord. There were many holidays sanctioned by the Catholic Church, whose spiritual authority helped bind the society's members together. Ultimately, the nobility could and often did resort to brute force to keep serfs in line.

Once Henry took Church lands, he sold blocks of them to merchants, who were becoming more numerous and powerful as trade routes reopened between Europe and the Ottoman Empire in the East because of the holy wars known as the Crusades. Merchants, in turn, followed by the nobles themselves, began to enclose their rural holdings, converting them into sheep farms, which would yield wool for the burgeoning market for cloth and clothing. The serfs were summarily evicted from their customary lands, including the commons. Some were then employed as wage laborers caring for sheep, while some moved to the towns to seek employment there, as the craftsmen and merchant guilds were gradually converted into

profit-seeking businesses. Others tried to get land not owned and become yeomen farmers, while many became vagabonds and paupers, often headed for the poorhouse, where they would be duly punished for their poverty with forced labor. The state formed by Henry VIII began to enact laws making use of the common land a capital crime; a person could be hanged for cutting down a tree.[1]

The working class was thus created through acts of expropriation and violence. As Marx put it, "If money comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek, capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt."[2] Workers viewed the new system with horror, seeing it correctly as one that aimed to annihilate their culture. As historian E. P. Thompson wrote:

> The rise of a master-class without traditional authority or obligations: the growing distance between master and man: the transparency of the exploitation at the source of their new wealth and power: the loss of status and above all of independence for the worker, his reduction to total dependence on the master's instruments of production: the partiality of the law: the disruption of the traditional family economy: the discipline, monotony, hours and conditions of work: loss of leisure and amenities: the reduction of the man to the status of an "instrument."[3]

Labor markets tell us nothing about what goes on in the workplaces of the world. Again, Marx was prescient when he wrote these famous words:

> This sphere that we are deserting, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property

> and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, say of labour-power, are constrained only by their own free will. They contract as free agents, and the agreement they come to is but the form in which they give legal expression to their common will. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to himself. The only force that brings them together and puts them in relation with each other, is the selfishness, the gain and the private interests of each. Each looks to himself only, and no one troubles himself about the rest, and just because they do so, do they all, in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an all-shrewd providence, work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal and in the interest of all.
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> On leaving this sphere of simple circulation or of exchange of commodities, which furnishes the "Free-trader Vulgaris" with his views and ideas, and with the standard by which he judges a society based on capital and wages, we think we can perceive a change in the physiognomy of our dramatis personae. He, who before was the money-owner, now strides in front as capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his labourer. The one with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business; the other, timid and holding back, like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but—a hiding.[4]

If capitalism is a system built upon the exploitation of wage labor, it is also one of expropriation, the taking without compensation of something of value. People became wage workers

> because their land was stolen. Businesses expropriate the land, air, and water necessary for life, using it free of charge. Capitalists also kidnapped Black Africans into slavery, using their bodies to produce the sugar, tobacco, and cotton that supercharged capitalism and helped make it a global mode of production. Women's bodies have also been expropriated, with raped female slaves used to birth more slaves. Women were expelled from precapitalist economies and compelled, in effect, to provide costless (to capital) services that continuously reproduced the labor force that generated the profits necessary for capital accumulation.

Economists seldom say much about work.[5] They talk about the supply of and the demand for labor, but they have little to say about what we do as we earn our daily bread. Like most commentators, they believe that modern economies will require ever more skilled workers, highly educated, performing their tasks in clean and quiet quarters and sharing in decision-making with managerial facilitators.

We should disabuse ourselves of such notions. In the world today, most workers do hard and dangerous labor, wearing out their bodies every minute they toil, fearing the day that they will be discarded for a new contingent of hands. Workers get a wage in return for converting their life force into a commodity owned by those who have bought it.

The International Labor Organization (ILO), an agency of the United Nations, issues an annual report, formerly titled *Global Employment Trends* but now called *World Employment and Social Outlook*.[6] The report examines unemployment, poverty employment, and vulnerable employment. The unemployed are those not working but actively searching for a job, and the working poor are those with positions that do not provide above a threshold amount of money. Two thresholds are used: $1.90 per day, "extreme working poverty," and $3.20 per day, "moderate working poverty."[7]

People in vulnerable employment are the self-employed—called in the report "own-account" workers—and unpaid but working family members in the household of the self-employed. In most of the world, vulnerable employment is known as casual work; the workers who do this do not have formal arrangements with an employer, such as a labor contract with stipulated wages. Here are some examples offered by Martha Allen Chen, an authority on the informal economy:

> Street vendors in Mexico City; pushcart vendors in New York City; rickshaw pullers in Calcutta; jitney drivers in Manila; garbage collectors in Bogotá; and roadside barbers in Durban. Those who work on the streets or in the open air are the most visible informal workers. Other informal workers are engaged in small shops and workshops that repair bicycles and motorcycles; recycle scrap metal; make furniture and metal parts; tan leather and stitch shoes; weave, dye, and print cloth; polish diamonds and other gems; make and embroider garments; sort and sell cloth, paper, and metal waste; and more. The least visible informal workers, the majority of them women, work from their homes. Home-based workers are to be found around the world. They include garment workers in Toronto, embroiderers on the island of Madeira, shoemakers in Madrid, and assemblers of electronic parts in Leeds. Other categories of work that tend to be informal in both developed and developing countries include: casual workers in restaurants and hotels; subcontracted janitors and security guards; day laborers in construction and agriculture; piece-rate workers in sweatshops; and temporary office helpers or off-site data processors.[8]

A man selling lottery tickets on a street corner, a woman hawking tamales in a parking lot, or a teenager offering rickshaw rides are other examples of vulnerable employment. A child helping her mother sell the tamales is an example of an unpaid family member doing vulnerable work. In all countries, and especially in rich ones, not all self-employment is vulnerable. However, in all countries,

but mostly in poor ones, the vast majority of the self-employed are poor and vulnerable.

The ILO estimates the number of people in each of the three categories—unemployed, working poor, and vulnerably employed. Here are the data for 2019, with some additional numbers for 2020. The last "normal" year, that is, pre-pandemic, was 2019. COVID-19 swept through the world after this and thoroughly disrupted global labor markets. We don't know how long the pandemic will continue or even if there will ever be a return to "normal." So, readers should keep this in mind when considering the data. In any case, pandemic or not, in much of the world precarious employment, declines in the labor force participation rate (the ratio of the labor force to the population above a certain age) because of workers deciding to stop looking for work, and low wages remain the norm.

Unemployment: 188 million: 5.4 percent of a world labor force of about 3.458 billion. In 2009, at the bottom of a deep global economic downturn, the rate was 7.1 percent of a world labor force of about 3.24 billion. In 2020, COVID-19 labor market dislocations pushed the unemployment rate up to 6.5 percent. These might seem low rates given the extreme poverty in so much of the world. But two caveats must be considered. First, these are fully unemployed persons, meaning that they have no employment but are seeking work. In poor countries, such a state is untenable over an extended period. No work means no income, and no income soon enough spells death. Therefore, tens of millions of people engage in various types of informal employment not captured by official statistics. There will always be children below the age covered by the labor force definitions—sixteen years of age in the United States but lower in most countries—working and thus supplementing household income. Second, we must consider hidden unemployment. In 2019, there were 165 million workers who were "involuntarily working part-time" and 119 million who would prefer to work but for some personal reason were not actively seeking work; they are

called "discouraged" workers in the United States. Adding these to the official unemployment rate gives an expanded rate of 15.9 percent. Working hours fell dramatically in 2020, with the decline for those forced to work fewer hours equivalent to a loss of 131 million jobs. The labor force participation rate (labor force divided by working-age population) and the employment of the working-age population both fell dramatically in 2020. The former fell by 2.1 percent, and the latter dropped by 2.7 percent, indicating an enormous increase in discouraged workers. When work disappears suddenly, with millions of employers shuttering their doors, what is the point of searching for work?

Working Poor: Having a job is no guarantee that a person will not live in poverty. Typically, poverty is measured using an absolute money income. That is, using the United States as a universal yardstick, a number of dollars per day is chosen as a cut-off point so that those who are poor have a daily income less than this amount, while those above it are not poor. There are numerous flaws in this approach: the arbitrariness of the cut-off number; the assumption that relative poverty is irrelevant (income may rise above the threshold, but a person may at the same time fall further behind those with higher incomes); the focus upon only poor countries (the ILO assumes zero working poor in rich countries); the inadequacy of the data collection; and the implicit assumption that prices for similar products are lower in poor nations.[9] The data below should, therefore, be taken with a strong dose of skepticism.

In 2019, the ILO estimates that 234.4 million people were living in "extreme working poverty," earning a wage of less than $1.90 per day, which was 7.1 percent of total employment. According to the ILO, this was a marked decline from 1994 when the numbers were 753 million and 31.6 percent. In 2019, there were 402.3 million living in "moderate working poverty," earning less than $3.20 per day, 12.2 percent of all employment. By comparison, the figures for 1994 were 504.7 million and 21.2 percent. Even accounting for flaws in the definitions and data collection methods, official

(ILO-calculated) working poverty is widespread. It is difficult to imagine how a family anywhere in the world could be supported on $96 a month ($3.20 per day times 30). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, as many as 811 million people faced hunger in 2020.[10] If that $96 a month had to be shared by four persons, that would be $24 per person per month or less than $1.00 per day. Who could even be fed for so little?

COVID-19 generated significant increases in working poverty. Extreme working poverty rose by 31 million in 2020, and moderate working poverty by 77 million, for 7.8 and 14.2 percent, respectively. These are those who still had jobs. Given that so many lost employment, the data for working poverty greatly understate the degree of labor market—and hence, personal—distress.

Although the heterogeneity of the working class is discussed in more detail in other chapters, note here that employment and wages vary significantly across countries by gender, race, location inside a nation, and other factors. Women are more likely to be unemployed, poor, in vulnerable employment, and less educated. The same can be said of those marginalized by race, ethnicity, and religion.

Vulnerable employment: Of global employment, 45 percent is own-account, including unpaid family members working with a self-employed person. Both are defined as in vulnerable employment. In the first category, there are 1.1 billion persons, and in the second, 360 million, for a total of 1.46 billion in precarious working circumstances, as one can easily imagine given the examples of such employment listed above.

Informal wage workers were much more likely to lose employment during the pandemic than were those with formal employment contracts. The ILO has limited hard data, but where it does, it estimates that informal employees suffered a 27 percent decline in employment compared to 12 percent for formally employed workers. For the self-employed (own-account), the

losses were 20 versus 16 percent. Compounding the misery of informal sector workers is that they seldom are eligible for any state-sponsored employment relief.

At the pandemic's start, my wife and I were living in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Indigenous men and women sold jewelry on a sidewalk underneath a building overhang in its famous downtown Plaza. Their wares were laid out on blankets, and tourists would look them over and often make a purchase. In the Plaza, a man and his daughter sold tamales from a pushcart. When COVID struck, the city put in effect strictures against gatherings and ordered mandatory quarantines. As a result, both the open-air jewelry market and the tamale stand closed. Thus, these workers' incomes must have fallen sharply. Some of the jewelry sellers moved their sales online, how successfully I could not discover. Federal government aid for the unemployed and business owners, which was substantial for a while, probably helped the Indigenous little, if at all. To make matters worse, the pueblos where the Native Americans in the state often live were devastated by the virus, which took the lives of some of the jewelers.

Second, the categories of working poor and vulnerable employment partly overlap. A self-employed person can be both vulnerable and poor, and he or she is counted in the labor force. However, in the statistical definition, an unpaid family member is only vulnerable; he or she is not counted in the labor force. These are statistical quibbles. No matter how you look at the numbers, they are staggering indicators of what the world of work is really like.

To these gloomy statistics should be added another: there were, at the beginning of 2020, by ILO estimates, at least 160 million child laborers, age five to seventeen—63 million girls and 97 million boys—one of every ten children in the world today. The ILO expects that another 8.9 million will be added to the total by 2022 because of the pandemic. The ILO classification of child workers is complex, but suffice it to say that 79 million children, almost half of these youthful toilers, are engaged in the worst forms of

such labor: drug trafficking, armed conflict, slavery, sex work, and dangerous and debilitating occupations like construction, brick making, and carpet making.[11]

It is not uncommon for working children to live in the countryside or to have been forced from their rural homes, sometimes "leased" by their parents, and made to toil away in the cities.[12] The parents are peasants, two billion strong, and their future is increasingly precarious. Their connection to the land becomes more tenuous every year, and millions move to the cities to become citizens of what Mike Davis calls the "planet of slums."[13] No amount of economic growth will absorb them into the traditional proletariat, much less into better classes of work.

FOR NEARLY EVERYONE in the world, work is hell. The sad truth is that many are demeaned, worn out, injured, mentally and physically deformed, and all too often killed on the job so that a few can be rich. The statistics fluctuate according to the ups and downs of capitalist economies and now, no doubt, because of the effects of environmental catastrophe. But should prosperity somehow miraculously return, will the world of work be transformed? Will we begin again "slouching toward utopia," to use the pathetically inapt phrase of Berkeley economist J. Bradford DeLong, who really believed that we are on the way toward a middle-class world of high-income and satisfied workers? I can promise you that we are not.

The devil, they say, is in the details. So, to give greater force to the data, I have added some concrete examples, and I am sure that readers can add many of their own.

- Consider the food-processing worker, Tarek Zia, from Bangladesh. Rising sea levels have forced many Bangladeshis to move away from rising seas and eroding river shores. When he was fifteen years old, Tarek moved ninety-three miles to Dhaka, the capital, to get a job and help his family, which had lost its farm due

to flooding.[14] The nation is notoriously lax in protecting worker safety. "On 24 April 2013, the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, which housed five garment factories, killed at least 1,132 people and injured more than 2,500. Only five months earlier, at least 112 workers had lost their lives in another tragic accident, trapped inside the burning Tazreen Fashions factory on the outskirts of Dhaka."[15] A month after Tarek went to work, a fire swept through the six-story building killing him and more than fifty of his workmates. The building had been constructed illegally, and there were no fire exits: this, 110 years after the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist fire in Manhattan.

- Consider Mira, a child prostitute in Mumbai, at age thirteen sent by her parents from her village in Nepal to work, they thought, as a domestic servant. Not long ago, there were at least 20,000 child prostitutes in the city, "displayed in row after row of zoo-like animal cages." The numbers appear to have fallen significantly. Accurate data are hard to come by, but there are probably several million children sex workers in the world. About Mira, we are told:

> When Mira, a sweet-faced virgin with golden brown skin, refused to have sex, she was dragged into a torture chamber in a dark alley used for "breaking in" new girls. She was locked in a narrow, windowless room without food or water. On the fourth day, when she had still refused to work, one of the madam's thugs, called a *goonda*, wrestled her to the floor and banged her head against the concrete until she passed out. When she awoke, she was naked; a rattan cane smeared with pureed red chili peppers had been shoved up her vagina. Later, she was raped by the *goonda*. "They torture you until you say yes," Mira recently recounted during an interview here. "Nobody hears your cries."[16]

- Consider Irfana, a Pakistani girl sold to the owner of a brick kiln at age six. Here is how she described her life:

> My master bought, sold, and traded us like livestock, and sometimes he shipped us great distances. The boys were beaten frequently to make them work long hours. The girls were often violated. My best friend got ill after she was raped, and when she couldn't work, the master sold her to a friend of his in a village a thousand kilometers away. Her family was never told where she was sent, and they never saw her again.[17]

- Consider this about Archie, from the ILO report on child labor:

> Every day, Archie wakes at 5 a.m., gets dressed, has breakfast and walks to work. There he squeezes himself into a narrow gap to dig blindly for gold in a deep underground pit, often underwater, breathing through a hose connected to a diesel-powered compressor. After 10 or 12 hours of labour, he returns home, has some dinner and goes to sleep. Archie is 11. Some of his young friends who work at the pit haul sacks of sand and gravel weighing more than they do, all day long.[18]

- Deadly labor has a long history. Consider the lacemaker Mary Anne Walkley, immortalized by Karl Marx in Volume 1 of *Capital*. Mary Anne died 146 years ago, but her story could be told today and not just of child workers like Mira and Irfana, but by hundreds of thousands of garment workers laboring in sweatshops every bit as bad as Walkley's, and not only in Pakistan and India but right here in the United States. If you look up from the streets of Manhattan's Chinatown, you see the

steam from hundreds of sweatshops where today's Mary Anne Walkleys work away their lives. Marx tells us:

> In the last week of June 1863, all the London daily papers published a paragraph with the "sensational" heading, "Death from simple over-work." It dealt with the death of the milliner Mary Anne Walkley, 20 years of age, employed in a highly respectable dress-making establishment, exploited by a lady with the pleasant name of Elise. The old, oft-told story, was once more recounted. The girl worked, on an average, 16½ hours, during the season often 30 hours, without a break, whilst her failing labor power was revived by occasional supplies of sherry, port, or coffee. It was just now the height of the season. It is necessary to conjure up in the twinkling of an eye the gorgeous dresses for the noble ladies bidden to the ball in honor of the newly imported Princess of Wales. Mary Anne Walkley had worked without intermission for 26½ hours, with 60 other girls, 30 in one room, that only afforded 1/3 of the cubic feet of air required for them. At night, they slept in pairs in one of the stifling holes into which the bedroom was divided by a partition of board. And this was one of the best millinery establishments in London. Mary Anne Walkley fell ill on the Friday, died on Sunday, without, to the astonishment of Madame Elise, having previously completed the work in hand.[19]

When Mary Anne Walkley died, London bakers often toiled, in blistering heat, 18 hours a day. Children as young as four were used to open and close trap doors in coal mines. Orphans were farmed out to employers, who exploited them viciously. In some parts of the world, nothing much has changed. Even in the

United States, children toil with their parents, picking the crops we eat without thinking about them.

- Consider cruise ship workers. Cruise ships usually register in countries such as Liberia and Panama to escape more burdensome U.S. labor laws. The employees who do the most onerous work are invariably people of color, typically from poor countries. Their pay is low, and their hours are long. If they get severely injured on the job and need hospital care, they are often forced to fly back to their home countries, even if better care is available in the United States. One worker from a Caribbean nation slipped on a kitchen floor while carrying a large pot of hot oil. The oil severely burned his leg and foot. He was taken out of a hospital in Anchorage, Alaska, and forced to take several flights home. In desperation, he called his mother and managed at a stopover in Miami to contact a lawyer his mother knew of through a friend. The attorney managed to get him care in Miami and then sued the shipping company. The company retaliated by contacting the immigration authorities, who promptly deported the man.[20]

  Cruise ship and other maritime workers suffered greatly during the pandemic. Although cruise ship companies made every effort to get passengers home, they didn't do the same for their employees. Some were stuck at sea for months. In mid-September 2020, there were an estimated 300,000 ship workers at sea, 10,000 on cruise ships. Monotony, limited food, strict quarantines, and no paychecks were their lot. Some committed suicide. Workers often organized—including a hunger strike—and family members consulted lawyers to redress their relatives' many grievances. The corporations that owned the cruise ships made it as difficult as possible for them. One family, the Szallers, Vilmos and Ildiko, faced difficulties getting answers from Carnival Cruise lines (whose CEO Mickey Aronson is a Miami billionaire and owner of the Miami Heat professional basketball team) after their son Jozsef committed suicide while onboard a Carnival ship.

Vilmos says communications with Carnival broke down soon after. As the Szallers tried to organize the retrieval of their son's body, including determining which jurisdiction would have to declare him legally deceased, they began to see the cruise company as having had a role in their son's death. Its labyrinthine corporate structure—a web of international entities designed to lower Carnival's tax liability—compounded their grief.[21]

- Consider the restaurant worker, Mr. Zheng. Just two decades ago, in Manhattan's Chinatown, restaurant workers often toiled for upwards of 100 hours per week for as little as $2.00 per hour. Here is how a reporter describes Mr. Zheng's life:

> Three years after arriving in this country from the coastal province of Fujian [in China], Mr. Zheng, 35, is still working off a $30,000 debt to the smugglers who secured his passage on a series of ships. He can devote very little of his meager busboy's salary to rent, so he has 11 roommates. They share a studio bracketed by triple-tiered bunk beds, with a narrow passage like a gangplank between them. One bachelor household among two dozen others in a complex of three low-rise buildings on Allen Street, they split a rent of $650 a month, paying about $54 each.
>
> Like the others, Mr. Zheng keeps his scant belongings in a plastic bag above his mattress, nailed beside the herbal-medicine pouches and girlie pictures that decorate his rectangle of a wall.[22]

In the United States today, restaurant workers are poorly paid, overworked, and often mistreated by their bosses. The average hourly wage in May 2020 for "cooks and food preparation workers" was $13.02; for "fast-food workers," it was $11.47.[23] The labor in kitchens is arduous and stressful, taking a long-term toll on bodies, with frequent injuries.

- Consider the New York City cab driver, Koffee, an African living in the city for thirty years. Here is an interview with him, conducted by the newsletter *Punching the Clock* (PTC):

  PTC: So what kind of hours do you drive?
  Koffee: Twelve hours, five to five.
  PTC: Do you mind working a twelve-hour shift?
  Koffee: That's how the industry, you know, they do it. In less than twelve hours you don't make nothing. Sometimes you can work twelve hours and go home with about $20 in your pocket.
  PTC: What do you do with your free time?
  Koffee: Free time? I relax. With this job, after twelve hours you can't do nothing. It's a killing job. Sitting here driving for twelve hours. You get home, you are exhausted. You don't want to do anything anymore. I get home, I go to sleep. When I get up I just have time to get something to eat.

- Consider the voice of a worker unemployed during this nation's first Great Depression, in the 1870s. What he says could be said, with appropriate variations, by nearly anyone who has experienced the brutality of long-term unemployment, from the Dust Bowl farmers of the 1930s to the victims of the massive plant closings of the past two decades, to the miserable jobless millions of the poorest countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

  > Twelve months ago, left penniless by misfortune, I started from New York in search of employment. I am a mechanic and am regarded as competent in my business. During this year I have traversed seventeen States and obtained in that time six weeks'

> work. I have faced starvation; been months at a time without a bed when the thermometer was 30 degrees below zero. Last winter I slept in the woods, and while honestly seeking employment I have been two and three days without food. When, in God's name, I asked to keep body and soul together, I have been repulsed as a "tramp and vagabond."[24]

- Consider the farm laborers, everywhere among the lowest paid and most overworked. Bending over the crops, in terrible heat and cold, working alongside their children, without enough to eat, like the coffee plantation workers who cannot afford to buy the crop they pick. In Mexico, just south of Arizona and California, here is what "free trade" has wrought:

> In the fields, a single portable bathroom might serve a whole crew of several hundred, with a metal drum on wheels providing the drinking water. . . . Toddlers wander among the seated workers, some of them nursing on baby bottles and others, their faces smeared with dirt, chewing on the onions. A few sleep in the rows, or in little makeshift beds of blankets in the vegetable bins. . . . As the morning sun illuminates the faces of the workers, it reveals dozens of young girls and boys. By rough count, perhaps a quarter of the workers here are anywhere from 6 or 7 years old to 15 or 16. . . . Honorina Ruiz is 6. She sits in front of a pile of green onions. . . . She lines up eight or nine onions, straightening out their roots and tails. Then she knocks the dirt off, puts a rubber band around them and adds the bunch to those already in the box beside her. She's too shy to say more than her name, but she seems proud to be able to do what her brother Rigoberto, at 13, is very good at. . . . These are Mexico's forgotten children.[25]

There are more than 800 million farm workers in the world. They "suffer short life expectancies, pesticide poisoning, and state-sponsored violence whenever they attempt to organize. Their working conditions are extraordinarily harsh, and their prospects for decent lives nonexistent."[26] In the United States, they have worked throughout the pandemic, sometimes in temperatures above 110 degrees Fahrenheit. Living, traveling, and working in groups, they have risked COVID-19 infection every day.

- Consider the workers in our packing houses preparing meat for our tables. Before the advent of modern production technology, the very names of these workers conjure up a vision of hell: stockhandlers, knockers, shacklers, stickers, beheaders, hide removers, skinners, leg-breakers, foot-skinners, backers, rumpers, hide-droppers, butchers, gut-snatchers, gutters, splitters, and luggers. The work was once done by European immigrants and African Americans. Today it is done by new arrivals from Latin America and Asia, but though the job titles have changed, the work is still dirty and dangerous:

> Beef, pork and poultry packers have been aggressively recruiting the most vulnerable of foreign workers to relocate to the U.S. plains in exchange for $6-an-hour jobs in the country's most dangerous industry. Since permanence is hardly a requirement for these jobs, the concepts of promotion and significant salary increases have as much as disappeared. That as many as half of these new immigrants lack legal residence seems no obstacle to an industry now thriving on a docile, disempowered workforce with an astronomical turnover.
>
> Staggering illness and injury rates—36 per 100 workers in meat—and stress caused by difficult, repetitive work often means employment for just a

> few months before a worker quits or the company forces him/her off the job. (Government safety inspections have dropped 43 percent overall since 1994, because of budget cuts and an increasingly pro-business slant at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.)[27]

I wrote the following as a post on Facebook, April 24, 2020. It gives a picture of work during the pandemic at a meatpacking plant in Greeley, Colorado: "The largest employer in Greeley, Colorado, is the food processor JBS USA Holdings Inc. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of JBS S.A., a Brazilian company and the largest processor of fresh beef and pork in the world. The plant in Greeley employs some 6,000 people, many of them immigrants. In Greeley, nearly 40 percent of the population (which is about 107,000) is Hispanic, meaning that many of the workers are Hispanic as well.

"Work in a meatpacking factory can best be described as laboring on a disassembly line, as carcasses are disassembled as the animal moves along a mechanized line. By all accounts, the work is intense and dangerous. Animal blood everywhere. Knives flying, cuts omnipresent, as the line moves ever faster and the boss demands more and more production.

"There was once a strong and radical union of packinghouse workers, but mechanization, globalization, and business consolidation, along with red-baiting, damaged the union beyond repair. Today, the much weaker and less radical United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) represents workers in some U.S. plants, including the one in Greeley. Just about any union is better than none, but the old union, the United Packinghouse Workers, won wages that were among the highest in the country. It also had an ingenious structure of shop stewards, who coordinated confrontations with management across plants nationwide. Today, wages are much lower and the union much less militant."[28]

"As essential labor, the operatives at the Greeley facility continued to work during the pandemic. The company did no testing, and the workers went without adequate personal protective equipment. As could have been predicted, employees soon became infected by the virus, and then they infected family members. Or they contracted the virus outside the plant and then infected their co-workers. Hundreds were ill, and several died. The situation went national when Trump and Pence referenced it at a daily news conference. Pence promised that tests would be quickly made available, and the company also promised testing immediately. Not surprisingly, neither promise has been kept. A report from Contact 7 in Denver on April 22 states:

> Now less than a week from the scheduled reopening of the plant, promises from the White House and JBS management have not been kept. 'We can only assume the reason they stopped testing is they don't want the numbers to come out, it's bad P.R.,' said Sylvia Martinez, a spokesperson for Latinos Unidos of Greeley. Multiple informed sources confirmed to Contact 7 Investigates that JBS management stopped testing shortly after it started doing so on April 11 and well before its promise to test its 6,000 employees. Insiders have told Contact 7 Investigates that between 40 percent and 80 percent of managers/supervisors tested positive on the initial day of testing and those results prompted JBS to end the testing program. 'I believe when it became apparent that most of the supervisors tested positive, JBS abruptly stopped the testing,' said JBS union president Kim Cordova.
>
> Sadly, the plant reopens today, April 24. The UFCW national president, Anthony Perrone, warns that it is not safe to reopen the meatpacking plants that have been closed, including the one in Greeley.

"Stories from the Smithfield plant in South Dakota are heartrending, with the same management lack of concern for the largely immigrant workforce. BBC News reports:

> But according to Smithfield employees, their union representatives, and advocates for the immigrant community in Sioux Falls, the outbreak that led to the plant closure was avoidable. They allege early requests for personal protective equipment were ignored, that sick workers were incentivized to continue working, and that information regarding the spread of the virus was kept from them, even when they were at risk of exposing family and the broader public.

"Today, governors in several states have begun opening up their economies, and many others are itching to do so. Let what is happening at these meatpacking plants, and many other essential workplaces, serve as a warning about what is likely to happen if we return to business as usual. We are in the midst of a horrible pandemic, and our leaders are advising tactics that will only worsen things, sickening and killing more people. Yesterday, Trump suggested that we could inject disinfectants to cleanse our bodies of the virus. Maybe that will be the salvation of the packinghouse workers and all of us."

This quote from a *New York Times* Guest Essay is appropriate. It tells us not just about meatpacking workers but about how their deplorable working conditions affect everyone else:

> This powerful connection between work life and broader public welfare has been undeniable in the pandemic, as workplace clusters of employees with the coronavirus have often led to community spread. Many meatpacking employees, for instance, were required to work close together without adequate

protection. The result? They brought the highly contagious virus home to their family, neighborhood and community.

A study published in May in the journal *Food Policy* found that the presence of a large beef-packing facility in a county, relative to comparable counties without such plants, increased per capita Covid-19 infection rates by 110 percent. The study estimated that 334,000 Covid infections in the United States were attributable to beef, pork and chicken processing plants.[29]

- Consider Michael, who took a job as a hotel desk clerk after thirty-two years of college teaching. He says:

> I thought that at the hotel I would have the luxury of not worrying about what I was going to do tomorrow. But while it was true that I didn't have to prepare for the next day's work, it was today's work that took its toll. The job was tiring; I was on my feet all day. At the end of the day I was free, but too exhausted to do anything. I often fell asleep soon after opening a book, as early as seven in the evening. And on some days, especially Sunday, which was the worst day in terms of work intensity and customer complaints, I couldn't sleep at all. The computer keys I had punched all day kept going through my head in an endless loop, and conversations I had with irate guests kept bothering me. Monday morning would arrive, and I had to be at work at seven, and I didn't catch up on sleep until about Wednesday evening. Teaching might have generated a lot of anxiety, but this was both physically and mentally debilitating. Thirty-two years of this would be unimaginable.[30]

- Consider the temporary clerical workers, Kimberly and Helen, two of millions of such workers worldwide. Here is how they describe their work:

> Minimal work. Boredom. And no challenging work. I'd much rather be fighting with a spreadsheet, trying to figure out how to set up a spreadsheet, rather than just entering in the numbers. A boss who treats you like a temp and is very much, like, always checking up on you or else totally ignoring you. Doesn't really remember your name. Says, "Oh, I'll just put this here. We'll wait till so-and-so gets back to work with it."
>
> The isolation. The lack of benefits. The monotony. The underemployment. Your resources, your skills, your intelligence are not integrated. I mean, there's no change. So I guess just the hopelessness, just the stagnation. The fact that there's never any increase in cerebral activity. Even when they find out more about you, they still don't trust you to take on more. But the loneliness. It's really lonely. Eating lunch by yourself every single day. And no one ever asking you a personal question. Like the secretaries never, ever, ask, "Where are you from?" or "What have you been up to?"[31]

- Consider adjunct professors, who now teach most of the classes in U.S. colleges and universities. As these institutions have become more like businesses, focusing on the bottom line, they have slashed labor costs. Since teachers' salaries and benefits comprise a large share of such costs, they have hired more and more part-time instructors, replacing the full-timers who retire, quit, or die with adjuncts and adding adjuncts any time the faculty expands. Adjuncts typically get paid by the course and have limited or no benefits. Sometimes, they don't have offices or access to copying machines. Since the pay for a one-semester,

three-credit course might be as low as $2,000, adjuncts sometimes teach at more than one college, which often entails long commutes. They might find that when one of their courses is to begin in a week or so, their employer suddenly cancels it, usually because enrollments aren't high enough. It is especially difficult for adjuncts to qualify for unemployment compensation during the summer months.[32]

During the pandemic, adjunct unemployment skyrocketed. And now, hiring is still weak. Here is one adjunct venting about her situation on social media:

> Venting: because enrollment is down, most adjuncts have been cut this fall. I was told I'd be one of the lucky ones and have one four-credit hour course. But that was just cut down to a one-credit hour recitation of two combined sections—so they wouldn't have to pay me for two cr hrs. Max 49 students. That's a little over a thousand dollars for a semester, about $60 a week. If I complain, well, you know: blacklisted or unheard. If I don't complain, I should have doormat tattooed on my forehead. I hate no-win situations . . . obviously. We adjuncts save them so much money, and they won't even spring for an extra credit hour. The union here sucks, so that's a nothing-helping. Feeling genuinely bad. Sorry to be such a downer.

- Consider the exceptional history teacher, Ira Solomon, teaching in East Saint Louis, Illinois, a town extraordinary in its poverty. This is what he tells Jonathan Kozol, author of *Savage Inequalities*:

> "This is not by any means the worst school in the city," he reports, as we are sitting in his classroom on the first floor of the school. "But our problems are severe. I don't even know where to begin. I have no materials,

with the exception of a single textbook given to each child. If I bring in anything else–books or tapes or magazines–I pay for it myself. The high school has no VCRs. They are such a crucial tool. So many good things run on public television. I can't make use of anything I see unless I can unhook my VCR and bring it into the school. The AV equipment in the building is so old that we are pressured not to use it. . . .

"Of 33 children who begin the history classes in the standard track," he says, "more than a quarter have dropped out by spring semester . . . I have four girls right now in my senior homeroom who are pregnant or have just had babies. When I ask them why this happens, I am told, 'Well, there's no reason not to have a baby. There's not much for me in public school.' The truth is . . . [a] diploma from a ghetto high school doesn't count for much in the United States today. . . . Ah, there's so much bitterness—unfairness—there, you know. . . .

"Very little education in the school would be considered academic in the suburbs. Maybe 10 to 15 percent of students are in truly academic programs. Of the 55 percent of the students who graduate, 20 percent may go to four-year colleges: something like 10 percent of any entering class. Another 10 to 20 percent may get some other kind of higher education. An equal number join the military. . . .

"Sometimes I worry that I'm starting to burn out. Still, I hate to miss a day. The department frequently can't find a substitute to come here, and my kids don't like me to be absent."[33]

- Consider two welfare mothers, Ursula and Joy, working hard to keep their families together but excluded from the official count of workers and reviled by more respectable society.

URSULA: I used to feel downcast for being on welfare. It was something I felt low-rated about. It felt degrading. They want to know who is giving you this or who is helping to send your child to school. If I had to stop paying the water bill this month to keep them in school the next month, I would do that. But that's my business. I don't like them prying into what somebody may give me or who is paying something for me.

JOY: When you are on public assistance, it's like you're going to pick up someone else's money that you didn't work for. You didn't make it yourself. When I got my first welfare check it felt odd, because I could compare it to receiving my work check. I knew what it was like to have both. I used to hear people say, "Well, you are taking money from people that work and you are not working," It felt kind of funny to be a person on the other side this time. This is my first experience with welfare. Nobody in my household had ever been on public assistance but me. My mother worked for the government and so did my grandmother. I was the first person that ever needed welfare.

I don't like the people who work in the welfare offices. They are nasty to me. They have a bad attitude. They act real snooty and they really don't want to do the work. They act like the money is coming right out of their pockets. I figure, if I go in there with a nice attitude, because I know some people are nasty with them, too, then they will be different. But it doesn't help. They still are nasty.[34]

- Consider the following memorandum sent by a supervisor to a group of workers in a daycare center. Remember that these workers, all with considerable experience and many

child-raising skills, are typically close to the bottom of the wage scale:

> Now, more than ever, we as a business are under scrutiny by our clients. They will be watching us and questioning us to reassure themselves that their children are safe and secure in our care. Your role is to do the best you can when it comes to customer service. They have made a choice as to where they want their child to be. And we need to reassure them that they have made the proper choice. We need to give them what they pay for every minute of the day. Parents and children must be greeted by name when they arrive in the morning and when they leave at the end of the day. You need to be working with the children, using your AM and PM lesson plans at the beginning and the end of the day. You are not permitted to sit on tables, chat with other staff people, or be cleaning or doing anything but interacting with the children. . . . Remember, the customer always comes first and we always need to do what's best for children. . . . A pre-school classroom is a special place. It takes a special person to make great things happen for children. Always remember that we are tank fillers for the children. And that we owe it to the little people![35]

* Consider prisoner Dino Navarrete, one of tens of thousands of prison workers now laboring in the "prison-industrial complex," helping private businesses to make super-profits. Could there be a more debased form of labor outside outright slavery? But as a matter of fact, this is a growth industry. The United States leads the world in the number of prisoners, now approaching 1.5 million, and these convicts are overwhelmingly people of color.

> Convicted kidnapper Dino Navarrete doesn't smile much as he surveys the sewing machines at Soledad Prison's sprawling workshop. The short, stocky man with tattoos rippling his muscled forearms earns 45 cents an hour making blue work shirts in a medium-security prison near Monterey, California. After deductions, he earns about $60 for an entire month of nine-hour days.
>
> "They put you on a machine and expect you to put out for them," says Navarrete. "Nobody wants to do that. These jobs are jokes to most inmates here." California long ago stopped claiming that prison labor rehabilitates inmates. Wardens just want to keep them occupied. If prisoners refuse to work, they are moved to disciplinary housing and lose canteen privileges. Most importantly, they lose "good time" credit that reduces their sentences.
>
> Navarrete was surprised to learn that California has been exporting prison-made clothing to Asia. He and the other prisoners had no idea that California, along with Oregon, was doing exactly what the U.S. has been lambasting China for—exporting prison-made goods. "You might just as well call this slave labor, then," says Navarrete. "If they're selling it overseas, you know they're making money. Where's the money going to? It ain't going to us."[36]

- Consider Mike Lefevre, a "common" laborer. Here is what he said to Studs Terkel, author of the exceptional book *Working*:

> I'm a dying breed. A laborer. Strictly muscle work . . . pick it up, put it down. We handle between forty and fifty thousand pounds of steel a day. I know this is hard to believe—from four hundred pounds to three- and four-pound pieces. It's dying. . . .

> It's hard to take pride in a bridge you're never gonna cross. In a door you're never gonna open. You're mass-producing things and you never see the end result. I worked for a trucker one time. And I got this tiny satisfaction when I loaded a truck. In a steel mill, forget it. You don't see where nothing goes.
>
> I got chewed out by my foreman once. He said, "Mike, you're a good worker but you have a bad attitude." My attitude is that I don't get excited about my job. I do my work but I don't say whoopee-doo. The day I get excited about my job is the day I go to a head shrinker. How are you gonna get excited about pullin' steel? How are you gonna get excited when you're tired and want to sit down?
>
> It's not just the work. Somebody built the pyramids. Somebody's going to build something. Pyramids, Empire State Building—these things just don't happen. There's hard work behind it. I would like to see a building, say, the Empire State, I would like to see on one side of it a foot-wide strip from top to bottom with the name of every bricklayer, every electrician, with all the names. So when a guy walked by, he could take his son and say, "See, that's me over there on the forty-fifth floor. I put the steel beam in." Picasso can point to a painting. What can I point to? A writer can point to a book. Everybody should have something to point to.[37]

- Consider finally this chorus of pained voices, again from *Working* :

> For the many, there is a hardly concealed discontent. The blue-collar blues is no more bitterly sung than the white-collar moan. "I'm a machine," says the spot welder. "I'm caged," says the bank teller,

and echoes the hotel clerk. "I'm a mule," says the steelworker. "A monkey can do what I do," says the receptionist. "I'm less than a farm implement," says the migrant worker. "I'm an object," says the high-fashion model. Blue collar and white collar call upon the identical phrase: "I'm a robot." "There is nothing to talk about," the young accountant despairingly enunciates. It was some time ago that John Henry sang, "A man ain't nothing but a man." The hard, unromantic fact is: he died with his hammer in his hand, while the machine pumped on. Nonetheless, he found immortality. He is remembered.[38]

4

The Injuries of Class

Those who labor for others, especially under conditions in which they have little influence over how the work is performed or the quality of the product, lose part of their humanity. We are all capable of both the conceptualization and execution of our work; this is one of the things that defines human beings. We have lived on Earth for at least 200,000 years. Remarkably, for about 95 percent of that time, we survived well in small bands of gatherers and hunters. This most successful mode of production, lasting much longer than all successive modes combined, was marked by (and still is in the few remaining gathering and hunting groups) the most egalitarian social relationships ever seen in human society. It is also the best adaptation to the natural world we have ever managed to achieve.[1] In all such systems, work is conceptualized and executed in integrated tasks. Although there is typically a gender division of labor—though not great inequality between men and women—the tasks performed are not divided into subtasks (or details, as they are often called). The tools and equipment needed for labor, such as bows, spears, darts, bowls, baskets, yarn, ropes, cutting implements, boats, and the like, are made from start to finish by the members of the

group. Through trial and error and conscious experimentation, people learned much about plants and animals, how to cultivate and renew soil, avoid overpopulation, and become efficient enough to have plenty of free time.

We do not know all the facts of how and why hunters and gatherers were ultimately displaced by permanent settlements of farmers, beginning at least 10,000 years ago. We do know that agriculturalists worked much harder, were less healthy, were more susceptible to diseases, and had shorter life expectancies than their predecessors. However, as humans crowded into smaller spaces, their metabolisms changed dramatically. One effect was that birth rates rose greatly, and the world population grew rapidly as well. Within about 4,000 years, states began to appear, and human societies came to be marked by greater divisions of labor and distinct social classes. Roughly speaking, the new modes of production after gathering and hunting, such as slavery, feudalism, and finally capitalism and socialism, have been divided into a class of rulers (slaveowners, lords, kings, pharaohs, emperors, caliphs, capitalists, party leaders) and a subordinate class of workers (slaves, peasants, serfs, wage laborers). The labor of the subordinate class did and does the work that produces the output that allows the ruler class to live in splendor. There were and are, of course, intermediate classes—for example, professionals like doctors, bankers, stockbrokers, lawyers, etc. Some engage in day-to-day activities that allow rulers to extract a surplus from those who do the work.

In class societies before capitalism, labor was specialized but still task-oriented in that workers did a variety of tasks but performed each one from start to finish. It is common to say that such labor is skilled. However, there are no jobs that do not require some thought and time to do them properly. "Skill," then, is in an important sense a social construct, one used to rank workers hierarchically. In any event, with capitalism, something profound happened. As soon as workers were herded into factories (see chapter 5), employers hired supervisors to observe

what they did as they completed their tasks. They noticed that when task workers—those who had learned a trade requiring a relatively long apprenticeship—had a job to fulfill, they divided their task into simpler parts, performing each in turn as many times as the number of finished products they had to make. In his seminal book, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, Harry Braverman gave the example of a metalsmith with an order to make a large number of metal funnels, which can be paraphrased as follows:

> Suppose the number is one hundred. The smith, invariably a man, would first make a pattern of the funnel. Then, he would lay out one hundred funnels on a large sheet of metal. Next, he would cut out the one hundred funnels. Then, he would fasten the ends. Next, he would polish the one hundred pieces and do whatever other finishing work was necessary.

It was but a short step for capital to figure out that it would be cheaper to have unskilled (in the sense that they had not learned a task) workers do one of the steps repeatedly, transferring what they had done to the next detail person. The task labor would be minimized, and only that would be performed by the craftsman, for example, laying out the piece to be made. This breaking up of tasks into subtasks (details) is called the "Babbage Principle," after the mathematician and inventor Charles Babbage, who, along with Scottish professor Andrew Ure, first demonstrated its value to capitalists. Not only did it greatly cheapen production, but it also significantly expanded the number of people who could do any given job. Children could be employed, or women, who had been denied entry into craft (task) work, could now be hired to do detail work. This increase in the potential supply of labor placed downward pressure on wages. There was now, in Marxian language, a larger "reserve army of labor," one that enhanced managerial control of the workforce.

On the one hand, our capacity to transform nature opens tremendous possibilities for building a world of both material abundance and great personal and collective fulfillment. But

> on the other hand, under conditions of capitalist control and exploitation, our capacities can never be realized. Our work becomes drudgery, leading to a profound sense of alienation among those who must toil for wages. Workplaces become cages, from which it appears that there is no escape. What is worse, the major institutions of capitalist society conspire to make it appear that this is simply the way life is. There is, as former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher put it, "no alternative." This chapter is meant to give readers a sense of the injuries we suffer under such a system.[2]

We live in a complex, divided society. We are separated by wealth, income, education, housing, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. These divisions are much discussed; in the past decade, our major newspapers have devoted entire series to the growing income divide. The *New York Times* archives have 2,660 entries under "income inequality" between January 1, 1977, and January 1, 2007. This figure rose to 4,260 entries between January 1, 2007, and January 1, 2014. However, it has risen still more dramatically since then, to 9,872, between January 1, 2014, and August 30, 2021.[3] The wealth-flaunting of today's rich has become a topic much reported on as well. As early as 2007, this was the subject of a Sunday *New York Times Magazine* article titled "At Their Service."[4]

What is seldom talked about or written about in the mainstream media is the source of unequal income. To do so would require a discussion most reporters and, for that matter, most economists don't want to have. It would have to consider the most fundamental division, one at the core of our economic system, namely between a large class of working people, the working class, and a much smaller class of owners that employs the former, the capitalist class. The latter are those on the top rungs of the income and wealth ladders, whereas the former are on the bottom steps. These two great classes make the world go round, so to speak.

Workers and owners are connected and antagonistic to each other in fundamental ways:

- It is through the working class's labor that the goods and services necessary for our survival are produced.
- It is through the ownership of society's productive wealth—land, machines, factories, offices—that the owning class can compel this labor to be done. Workers must sell their capacity to work to gain access to this productive wealth since no one can live without using it.
- In terms of society's "reproduction," the relationship between labor and capital is essential. So much of what we do presupposes the successful sale of labor power, and without the money from such a sale, nothing appears to exist.
- The essence of production in capitalism is the ceaseless accumulation of capital, making profits, and using such profits to increase the capital at the owners' disposal. Competition among capitals both drives accumulation and is driven by it, in a relentless dance.
- However, to accumulate capital, employers must make sure that workers cannot claim possession of all they produce. This means that employers must strive for maximum control of the entire production apparatus and the social forces and institutions that might interfere with this control: for example, the state, schools, and media. At all costs, workers must be prevented from getting the idea that they have rights to the output they make.

The organization of capital and labor in our society has adverse effects on working people. Before examining these, note that the process of accumulation, beginning with the extraction of a surplus from the worker's labor, is hidden from view so that workers do not know or are confused about what is happening to them. The market, which embodies the forces of supply and demand, effectively conceals what transpires in the workplace. But other institutions operate to obscure the truth, too. One example is the public school system and the tireless promotion of individualism

and nationalism at its core. Once these alleged virtues are internalized by students, it makes it easier for capital to control the labor process. Individualism makes it less likely that workers will collectively challenge capital's control of the labor process. Nationalism helps capital spread from rich countries to poor ones. Teacher-scholars Peter McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur give a startling example of one of the fruits of former president George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind" initiative:

> Today urban schools are adroitly organized around the same principles as factory production lines. According to [Jonathan] Kozol, "rising test scores," "social promotion," "outcome-based objectives," "time management," "success for all," "authentic writing," "accountable talk," "active listening," and "zero noise" constitute part of the dominant discourse in public schools. Most urban public schools have adopted business and market "work-related themes" and managerial concepts that have become part of the vocabulary used in classroom lessons and instruction. In the "market-driven classrooms," students "negotiate," "sign contracts," and take "ownership" of their own learning. In many classrooms, students can volunteer as the "pencil manager," "soap manager," "door manager," "line manager," "time manager," and "coat room manager." In some fourth-grade classrooms, teachers record student assignments and homework using "earning charts." . . . Kozol writes that in the market-driven model of public education, teachers are viewed as "floor managers" in public schools, "whose job it is to pump some 'added-value' into undervalued children."[5]

Racism, sexism, imperialism, media propaganda, and repression further distort the social matrix and hide its class basis:

- Endless war magnifies and deepens nationalism and promotes both racism and male chauvinism. Wars send workers back to society badly damaged in mind and body.

- Imperialism does the same thing as war and often causes it.
- Constant Orwellian propaganda by the media, think tanks, politicians, and business leaders denies the class polarization of capitalist society. A critical element of this misinformation campaign is the mythology surrounding the "free market" economy.
- When all else fails, naked violence ultimately serves to suppress class consciousness and sow seeds of doubt among workers who might otherwise be inclined to mutiny against the system.

Against this background, let us look at the injuries of class. First, consider unemployment. Separating workers from productive wealth creates the possibility that workers will be unemployed and unable to find a buyer for their labor power. In addition, we know from studying the history of capitalist economies that they periodically sink into recession or depression and these crises are part of the nature of the system. In such circumstances, unemployment rises dramatically. Furthermore, capital is constantly searching the heavens for sunny skies (higher profits). If it finds them other than where they now are, it shuts down one operation and opens another. Plant contractions and closings will therefore be regular occurrences.

What these things mean for working people is a pervasive sense of insecurity and fear so that even what seems to be the most stable employment will "melt into air."[6] Fear and insecurity not uncommonly produce two responses: a kind of joyless penury or a live-for-the-moment orientation that often takes the self-destructive forms of debt, drinking, and the like. In a recent essay, referring to the workers in the mining town in which I was born, I wrote:

> Mining towns in the United States were typically owned by the mining companies, and the companies exerted a near totalitarian control over the residents. They owned the houses, the only store (the infamous "company store"), all utilities, the schools, the library, everything. They had their own private police (the

> Coal and Iron Police in Pennsylvania) sanctioned by state law. The climate in such a town is one of perpetual insecurity and fear, emotions compounded by the danger of the work in the mines…. It is difficult to overstate the power of fear and poverty in shaping how working men and women think and act. Fear of losing a job. Fear of not finding a job. Fear of being late with bill payments. Fear of the boss's wrath. Fear your house might burn down. Fear your kids will get hurt. I inherited these emotions.[7]

Should a person face an extended bout of unemployment or a plant closing, the potential injuries of class multiply, as has been amply demonstrated: suicide, homicide, heart attack, hypertension, cirrhosis of the liver, arrest, imprisonment, mental illness.[8]

The members of the owning class are almost always better situated to withstand the storms of economic crisis or even unemployment, so these are injuries that the system does not inflict on them. A few years ago, Michael Gates Gill, a wealthy former advertising executive who lost his job, was featured in the *New York Times* for his book, *How Starbucks Saved My Life: A Son of Privilege Learns to Live Like Everyone Else*.[9] Gill gets a job in a Starbucks, and there he learns about ordinary people. By most accounts, the book is not very good. However, the author had connections, and he not only managed to get it published by a trade press but reviewed in our premier newspaper. The chance of this happening to "everyone else" is close to zero. The stories of job losses are written in the litany of woes that are an everyday reality for most people; they are anything but exotic and receive almost no public attention.

Unemployment in our society is a constant threat to the employed and a torment to those who cannot find work. To be unemployed is almost to drop out of society; since to have no relation to the market is not to exist.

I add here that those who do unpaid labor, especially homemakers, must certainly experience something akin to the unemployed. Their work, which involves numerous tasks not so easy to learn,

is devalued to such an extent that an estimate of its value is not included in the Gross Domestic Product. The unpaid labor of poor single women with children is considered so worthless that they have been forced to give it up and seek wage labor, often taking care of the children of others while theirs are attended to haphazardly or not at all.

Workers comprise the subordinate class. They usually are compelled to react to decisions made by others. Dependent upon employers, they are at the same time apprehensive of them because employers hold the power to deny workers the life-sustaining connection to the means of production. Exploitation, dependence, and insecurity—in a system where workers are bombarded with the message that they and they alone make the decisions that determine their circumstances—make for a toxic brew. When drunk often enough, it creates a personality lacking in self-confidence, afraid to take chances, easily manipulated and shamed.

The subordination of workers, combined with the market mechanism that ratifies and reinforces it, means that capitalist societies will display ineradicable inequalities in variables of great importance: wealth, income, schooling, healthcare, housing, and childcare. What is more, the market will, absent powerful countervailing forces, not only reproduce inequalities but deepen them, as we have seen so clearly in the United States over the past fifty years. This inequality generates its own class injuries. All else being equal, the greater the inequality of income within a state, the higher the mortality rate. It appears that the psychological damage done to poor people as they contemplate the gap between themselves and those at the top of the income distribution has an independent effect on a wide variety of individual and social health outcomes.[10] Everything we know about the correlation between health and other social indicators, including income (a decent though not perfect proxy for class), tells us that working people will suffer in manifold ways.

It has been said that the only thing worse than having a job is not having one. This may be true, but what does it say about

work? Work in capitalism is a traumatic affair. We all can conceptualize what we do before we do it. When applied to work, this capability has allowed human beings to transform the world in profound ways. We can invent tools and machines and socially divide our labor so that the earth's riches can be unlocked and a cornucopia of output produced. However, the human capacity to both conceptualize and then act upon this is denied to workers. Their labor power is a mere commodity, the property of their employer. It has been subdivided, mechanized, and otherwise controlled, such that conceptualization is reserved for those who do management's bidding. In addition, we know now that the transformation of the earth has been wrought savagely and destructively during the reign of capitalism. Capital sees the air, land, and water as "free" resources, so it is costless for employers to pollute them.[11]

Humans have changed the world as they have interacted with the non-human parts of it. And at the same time, since we are embedded in the world, we have, by definition, transformed ourselves. Therefore, several hundred years of capitalism have made us into different people than we were before its ascendancy. This system requires a certain type of human being and a certain kind of relationship of people to the natural world, and those who dominate the workings of this system do all they can to ensure that these requirements are met. We may think we are independent beings and can see things objectively, but this is not true. We must take certain actions to survive capitalism, and over time we may become habituated to our behaviors, coming to think of them as normal, as part of human nature. Similarly, taking a cue from powerful superiors, we may also think it is natural to objectify nature, believing it is simply there to serve our needs. In other words, living in an alienating world will alienate us—from one another, from the goods and services we produce, from the physical world around us, and even from ourselves.

Perhaps some examples will clarify what I just wrote. Let me preface these with the prescient words of Adam Smith:

> The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects are perhaps always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.The torpor of his mind renders him not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life.[12]

Smith's remarks are surely exaggerated, given that every job requires some thought. And he doesn't grasp what happens to the physical bodies of those who do repetitive labor. Yet, there is some truth in what he says. I once taught classes one day a month, in an all-day session, to automobile workers at a General Motors plant near Pittsburgh. Two groups labored in the factory. Some were craft workers—pattern and tool-and-die makers. Others toiled on an assembly line. Classes with the first cohort were always invigorating, with questions, comments, and discussions throughout the day. With the second, it was an effort to get anyone to speak. They didn't want to be there, despite the paid day off from work. The craft laborers did varied tasks, each of which required much training. They often had downtime during which they could read and talk to one another. On the assembly line, noise and the fast pace of material meant that there was no downtime or much chance to speak to their workmates. The differences were striking.

Postal Workers: In 2019, in the United States, there were 525,920 postal workers. Ever since the US Postal Service (USPS) was partially privatized, stress among those employed has risen dramatically. There have been constant cutbacks in employment and

extreme pressures for carriers, sorters, and clerks to work faster and harder for less pay. Part-timers carry much of the mail now, working without full benefits and often forced to use their own vehicles. A recent report by the Inspector General of the USPS found that between 2009 and 2018, "non-career" (part-time and temporary) employees rose by 54 percent.[13] While they worked long hours in 2020 to deliver millions of mail ballots, former president Donald Trump appointed a postmaster general who decommissioned mail sorting machines around the country, probably to help Trump stop mail balloting. But whatever the reason, this intensified an already onerous work regimen. In 2020, postal employees delivered 1.5 billion Amazon packages alone.[14]

A major scandal has erupted over massive wage theft by postal supervisors, who have been changing workers' timecards to reduce their actual hours worked, cheating them of wages, especially overtime pay. Hundreds of labor arbitrations initiated by the postal labor unions have documented thefts amounting to millions of dollars. This criminal activity has taken place at hundreds of post offices across the country. But while large backpay orders have been issued, many workers have still not received the money owed them. In some cases, out-of-arbitration or court settlements have given employees only a fraction of the wages stolen. The supervisors responsible for the robberies have largely gone unpunished, simply ordered to submit to some more training. It is difficult to imagine the psychological damage done to people when they have worked and not been paid.

> Nancy Campos's back ached as she loaded more than 100 Amazon packages onto her truck. The 59-year-old grandmother, a mail carrier for the U.S. Postal Service, had worked 13 days in a row without a lunch break, and now she was delivering on the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday to keep up with a never-ending flow of boxes.
>
> At the end of her shift that January day, Campos filled out her time sheet. Then she took a picture of it—for proof.

> "I knew what was going to happen," said Campos, who delivers mail in Midland, Texas, "because it happens every pay period."
>
> Two weeks later, when she checked her paystub in the payroll system, she said she was missing six hours of overtime pay. That added up to about $201 in lost wages—a week's worth of groceries.[15]

Campos went on to say, "We are depending on that money. When you get shorted, it's the most horrible feeling."[16]

Automobile Workers: In May 2021, there were 891,500 automobile workers (motor vehicle and parts manufacturing) in the United States.[17] Not only are they facing rapidly rising job insecurity, but they are also confronted every day with a work regimen so controlled that they must work fifty-seven of every sixty seconds. What must this be like? What does it do to mind and body? In this connection, it is instructive to recall (from chapter 1) Ben Hamper's book *Rivethead*. Hamper worked in an old plant, where the norm was about forty-five seconds of work each minute. He eventually got a job in a new "lean production" facility. He called it a "gulag." In her book, *On the Line at Subaru-Isuzu*, sociologist Laurie Graham tells us about her work routine in one of these gulags.[18] Below, I have skipped some of the steps because I just want to give readers a sense of the work. Remember as you read it that the line is relentlessly moving while she is working:

1. Go to the car and take the token card off a wire on the front of the car.
2. Pick up the 2 VIN [vehicle identification number] plates from the embosser and check the plates to see that they have the same number.
3. Insert the token card into the token card reader.
4. While waiting for the computer output, break down the key kit for the car by pulling the 3 lock cylinders and the lock code from the bag.

5. Copy the vehicle control number and color number onto the appearance check sheet. . . .
8. Lift the hood and put the hood jig in place so it will hold the hood open while installing the hood stay.
22. Rivet the large VIN plate to the left-hand center pillar.
23. Begin with step 1 on the next car.

This work is so intense that it is not possible to steal a break, much less learn your workmate's job so that you can double up, then rest while she does both jobs. Within six months of the plant's startup, most of the workers had to wear wrist splints for incipient carpal tunnel syndrome. Necks and backs ached from bodies twisted into unnatural positions for eight hours, or more, a day. Supervisors recommended exercises and suggested that workers who cannot deal with the pain are sissies.

Most of the workers in this industry are in the United Automobile Workers union (UAW), an iconic organization that waged heroic sit-in strikes, suffering police violence, in order to organize the plants during the 1930s. Over the past forty years, however, the union's collective bargaining strategy has been one of labor-management cooperation and concessions. This has meant plant closings, lower real wages, constant overtime, more injuries, less new organizing, and more nonunion competitors. For example, the UAW has not organized plants in the South, nor could it organize the Tesla factory when it was in California. As a result, working conditions overall in the industry have deteriorated. As co-workers told one Tesla worker who suffered a severe job-related injury, "There wouldn't be the same rules, training, and safety expectations as at other workplaces."[19] Compounding worker woes, the union has been mired in a massive corruptions scandal, one emanating from the top of the union hierarchy, including two former presidents.[20]

Some of the automobile workers I taught near Pittsburgh were transfers from a closed plant (a couple had seen two of their workplaces close). To save money for an uncertain future, many were working twelve-hour days, seven days a week. One man started to

cry when he told us of three workers who had committed suicide in the wake of the closure of his former plant.

What is true for auto workers is true for all who do this type of labor. Speed-up, stress, and injury are the rule and not the exception.

Clerks: There are at least 15 million clerks of all types in the United States.[21] Many years ago, I was on a television show with former secretary of labor Robert Reich. In response to my claim that most of the jobs being created were not all that desirable, he said that there were plenty of good jobs available, ones in which workers had a real say about them. (He was no doubt referring to the "quality circles" so popular then.) One such job was that of "clerk." I blurted out in a loud and incredulous voice, "CLERKS!" I suggested that perhaps Reich had never noticed the splints on the wrists of many clerks, signs of epidemic carpal tunnel syndrome. Since that time, I worked as a front desk clerk for a few months at the Lake Hotel in Yellowstone National Park. I describe the experience and what I learned in my book *Cheap Motels and a Hot Plate: An Economist's Travelogue*. Clerks work long hours; they are on their feet all day; they take regular abuse from customers. They are exposed in full view of supervisors with no place to hide; they are accorded no respect (think about customers on cell phones in grocery lines); their pay is low; their benefits negligible. After a hard day at the front desk, I only wanted a few drinks and a warm bed. The stress level was extraordinary.

During the pandemic, clerks have suffered great abuse. Grocery store employees have been harassed by customers, who have invaded their personal space, subjected to verbal abuse, and sometimes assaulted, with at least one who was killed by an angry shopper. Just google "grocery store clerk assaulted" to get an idea of what has been happening, and then try to imagine the anxiety this has created.[22]

Restaurant Workers: The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported

that in May 2020, more than 11,262,850 persons were working in "Food Preparation and Serving-Related Occupations." Their numbers have been growing for years.[23] The pace of the work, the pressure of it, is unbelievable. Check out the arms and legs of a kitchen worker. They are full of cuts and burns. Substance abuse is widespread. The British labor union Unite in 2017 surveyed kitchen workers and found serious physical and mental health problems among its members. As reported in *Vice*:

> According to Unite, which published the results last week [late April 2017], 44 percent of chefs report working between 48 and 60 hours each week, with 14 percent working in excess of 60 hours each week. Half of kitchen workers revealed that they are regularly expected to stay after their shift had officially ended. And when asked whether they believe that their work hours impacted their health, 69 percent answered yes.
>
> In addition to the physical demands of working in a kitchen, Unite found that poor mental wellbeing is common among chefs. As a result of working such long hours, 51 percent of chefs suffer depression and 78 percent have had an accident or near miss at work due to fatigue. Many chefs reported taking painkillers (56 percent), alcohol (27 percent), and other stimulants (41 percent) to see them through a shift.[24]

This is an occupation I follow closely since family members do such work. It would amaze me if the results of this survey were different if done today, or if one was done in any country in the world.

Secretaries, Administrative Assistants, and Office Support: Employment in these occupations in May 2020 was about 20 million.[25] Those working in them are poorly paid, many in sick buildings, stuck in badly designed chairs, staring at computer screens for hours, taking orders all day long (usually women from men), and often heavily regimented. Necks and shoulders ache;

headaches are many; carpal tunnel syndrome is common. These workers, whose working conditions were satirized so skillfully on the television series *The Office*, have to contend with daily degradations, including all too prevalent sexual harassment.[26]

Security Workers: At least three million men and women now watch over others in prisons, malls, gated communities, in places like Iraq where U.S. troops are engaged in warfare, and on our city streets.[27] This type of work is guaranteed to be stressful and to generate an extremely jaundiced and pejorative view of the rest of society and an extreme, macho personality, prone to violence. Read any account of a prisoner's life, and you will find pervasive cruel treatment by guards, some difficult to stomach.[28]

Custodial Workers: In October 2020, there were more than four million building and grounds workers in the United States, many of them immigrants, keeping our buildings clean and the grounds swept and manicured.[29] Often they are hired by contractors who are themselves employed by the buildings' owners. It has taken monumental efforts by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to organize some of these exploited workers. They must often labor close to dangerous cleaning fluids, solvents, and chemical fertilizers. Much of the time, these workers are invisible to the rest of the workforce. The professors where I worked seldom knew who cleaned their offices and kept the campus grounds in good shape. I helped these men and women form a labor union in the early 1970s. During the campaign, they (especially the women) faced daily threats from their supervisors. I was proud of all of them when they voted solidly for the union.[30]

Medical Workers: In May 2020, more than 15 million people were laboring in our hospitals, Urgicare centers, practitioners' offices, nursing homes, and individual residences.[31] Except for those at the top, including healthcare administrators and some physicians, healthcare is a minefield of poor working conditions. Even nursing

has been degraded so much that the nursing shortage could be nearly filled simply by returning disaffected nurses to their profession. At the request of the California Nurses Association, I spoke one summer to nurses in four Texas cities. I heard many tales of woe: 16-hour days, two weeks straight of 12-hour shifts, insane patient loads, constant cost-cutting that damages patient health, demeaning treatment by administrators, and so forth. Conditions only worsen as one goes down the healthcare occupation ladder.

During the pandemic, the media have been awash in stories about the extreme difficulties those on the treatment frontline face. This headline from a Kaiser Family Foundation/*Washington Post* report sums this up: "KFF/Post Survey Reveals the Serious Mental Health Challenges Facing Frontline Health Care Workers a Year into the COVID-19 Pandemic."[32]

Gig Workers: Companies like Amazon and Uber do their business online. Each has many direct employees; Uber has some 20,000, while Amazon has about 1.3 million worldwide. However, both companies hire other service providers to make deliveries and serve as taxi drivers. The company classified all of Uber's drivers and deliverers as independent contractors, as are many of Amazon's delivery drivers. There are plenty of other companies that run their businesses in a similar way. They are essentially platforms that can be accessed through an app (on a smartphone) by those who purchase their services. The internet and the smartphone have been critical in their creation and success in making money. What these businesses do is serve as matchmakers, typically between sellers and consumers but also, and importantly, between businesses and workers. Tech analyst Azeem Azhar gives an idea of the scope of the matchmaking once the "gig economy" got going:

> Soon, we could order taxis, takeaway food, and massages from the comfort of our couches. TaskRabbit, now owned by furniture giant Ikea, will dispatch someone to help you assemble your

> new bookcase. Talkspace will help you find a therapist. Wag will find a walker for your dog.[33]

Uber has more than three million drivers it can use globally. They register with the platform, and then customers use an app to secure a ride. A driver is notified, picks up the rider, and goes to the destination. Part of the fare goes to Uber, the rest plus tip to the driver. Numerous other platforms function in the same way. The workers are, in effect, own-account laborers, except that they do not stand on a street corner selling tamales.

Proponents of gig labor argue that the matchmaking platforms make markets more efficient and more socially beneficial. They also provide employment opportunities, especially in the Global South. However, more efficient markets simply mean greater profitability for the owners of the platforms. They do nothing in themselves to improve the welfare of the workers, much less societies as a whole. If we consider gig workers, their employment is a decidedly mixed blessing. Some are happy they have found work, especially in difficult times such as the pandemic. However, they have numerous complaints. They are at the mercy of consumers, who can ruin their chances of future employment with a bad review of their work. They often are cheated out of wages they have earned or must wait a long time to be paid. Net pay is often not enough to live above the poverty level. Their employment is often sporadic, and it is always "on-call," so it is difficult to have a normal life. Delivery drivers, especially those on e-bikes, often have their vehicles stolen. Since most platform laborers are classified as independent contractors, they enjoy no labor law protections, including the right to form unions without employer interference. They must also bear costs usually borne by business owners, such as vehicles, insurance, uniforms, and so forth.

Delivery gig work, whether it be of goods or people, is often dangerous to both drivers and pedestrians:

> Valdimar Gray was delivering packages for Amazon at the height of the pre-Christmas rush when his three-ton van barreled into an 84-year-old grandmother, crushing her diaphragm, shattering several ribs, and fracturing her skull.
>
> "Oh my god!" screamed Gray as he leaped out of his van. It was a bright, clear afternoon on Dec. 22, 2016, and the 29-year-old had been at the wheel of the white Nissan since early that morning, racing to drop Amazon packages on doorsteps throughout Chicago. He stood in anguish next to Telesfora Escamilla as she lay dying, her blood pooling on the pavement just three blocks from her home. After the police arrived, Gray submitted to drug and alcohol tests, which came up clean. He would later be charged with reckless homicide.[34]

Drivers fare worse than pedestrians:

> So far this year [2021], nine couriers have died in the five boroughs, according to delivery worker advocates. They include Federico Zaput Palax, who was killed when his scooter collided with a dump truck in Kensington, Brooklyn, in June, and Noe Amador Licona, who died over the weekend in Queens after being struck by a sedan.[35]

The horror of food delivery work is detailed in a report by *Los Deliveristas Unidos*, a worker advocacy group based in New York City. The account begins with a memorial to the drivers killed in 2020 and 2021.[36] Efficient markets, indeed!

THE TOTAL NUMBER of people performing the work listed above, excluding gig workers for whom no official count exists, is about 70 million, approximately 44 percent of all employment in the United States. If significant injuries of class are experienced by this many, in the richest country in the world, imagine what is true for the significantly great number of workers in the Global

South. Remember that worldwide there are over 800 million farm laborers!

Work in capitalism takes a heavy toll. Capitalists want our bodies, every part of them. They seek to use us until we wear out. Then, we are tossed aside. They sap our creativity, stealing it whenever and however they can and turning it against us in the form of divided and degraded labor that must be timed to the rhythm of machinery and algorithms. Our labors bore us to death, make us anxious, encourage us to be manipulative, alienate us in multiple ways—from co-workers, from products, from ourselves, from the natural world. They make us party to the production of debased and dangerous products, subject us to arbitrary authority, make us sick, and injure us. I remember my dad saying, when emphysema (the result of too many cigarettes, too much asbestos, and too much silica dust) destroyed his health, that he hadn't expected retirement to be like this. He and how many hundreds of millions of others?

It is not the CEO and the managers who suffer depression, hypertension, and heart attacks from being too long on the job. Instead, it is the assembly line worker, the secretary, and the kitchen laborer.[37] Those who cannot control their work hurt the most. And with all of these injuries of class, I haven't even touched upon the compound misery endured by Black workers, Hispanic workers, women workers, gay workers, transgender workers, and workers without proper national documents. And I have not described some of the worst types of labor: farm labor, domestic work, labor in recycling plants, and many others, which get truly demonic as we move outside the rich nations and into the poor ones. It is no wonder that people do not need much convincing to believe that happiness lies not in the workplace but in the shopping mall.

The daily debasement heaped upon working men and women breeds anger and rage. Often rage is turned inward and shows itself as depression, addiction, or suicide. Frequently, it is directed against children, spouses, lovers, or against some great mass of "others," like immigrants, women, radical minorities, or gay people.

But sometimes, it is correctly aimed at the class enemy and takes the form of riots, sabotage, strikes, demonstrations, even revolution. And then the creativity bound and gagged for so long bursts forth as people try to take control of their labor and their lives. This is what I think of as the "miracle of class struggle."

I am not going to end this essay with a reminder about how important it is to keep the struggles of the past fresh in the present. Or how it is necessary to educate the working class and essential to build a working-class movement and not just organize workers into unions. Nor will I say that there are hopeful signs that such a movement can be built, or why we must always fan the flames of dissent and revolution. You have heard all this before.

Instead, I am going to say something different. The injuries of class are deep and long-lasting. The poor education that is the lot of most working-class children leaves lasting scars that a picket line will not heal. The love lost when the factory-working father spent too much time in bars does not come back after a demonstration. I have been a radical, highly educated and articulate, but the fears and anxieties of my working-class parents are like indelible tattoos on my psyche. The dullness of mind and weariness of limbs produced by assembly line, store, and office do not disappear after the union comes to town. The prisoner might be freed but the horror of the prison cell lives on.

Wilhelm Reich, the German psychoanalyst, was kicked out of the psychoanalytic society because he was a communist. Ironically, he was also expelled from the Communist Party because he was a therapist who believed that the minds of working people, ravaged by the injuries of class, would have to be healed.[38] It would take real effort to help workers regain their humanity. I think Reich was right. We ignore the injuries of class at our peril.

5

Panopticon

> The panopticon is a disciplinary concept brought to life in the form of a central observation tower placed within a circle of prison cells.
>
> From the tower, a guard can see every cell and inmate, but the inmates can't see into the tower. Prisoners will never know whether or not they are being watched.
>
> This was introduced by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. It was a manifestation of his belief that power should be visible and unverifiable. Through this seemingly constant surveillance, Bentham believed all groups of society could be altered. Morals would be reformed, health preserved, industry invigorated, and so on—they were all subject to observation.[1]

Throughout this book, our emphasis has been on "control" as one of capitalism's two main underpinnings, the other being "exploitation/expropriation." In this chapter, we will examine control within the workplace. There are other sites of control: school, religion, laws, media. These are all generally supportive of

the interests of capital, namely, the endless drive to accumulate wealth. They all help to ensure that we behave so that the system continues to reproduce itself.

Since workplaces are the sites where profits are extracted from our labor, it is here that control is most critical. From capitalism's birth a few hundred years ago, successive efforts by business owners to command the labor process have given rise to what can be called "managerial control mechanisms."

In the early years of capitalism, people worked in their homes, often as a family, to produce products such as cloth from the materials and sometimes the equipment provided to them by merchant-capitalists. The final goods were then returned to the owner for a price. This "outworking" or "putting-out"—a phrase meaning the raw materials were "put out" to those who wove the cloth from the loaned wool—was abusive. Workers separated from one another could easily be pressured to accept lower prices if the merchant told them others would work for less than they demanded.[2] However, outworking or putting out was subject to much uncertainty. Workers might "cheat," using less wool per unit of cloth, keeping the unused portion for cloth that could be sold to other merchants. The family controlled the pace of the labor, and the employer could have no grasp of how the work was done.

Ultimately, the putting-out process was not sustainable because too much control was in the hands of the producers. The first great weapon instituted to lessen worker control was to herd producers into central locations, that is, into factories. Initially, work was carried on as before, with weavers and helpers, the latter often women and children. Many of the children were leased to factory owners by orphanages.[3] Employer control was enhanced by what soon enough became a ubiquitous factory whistle, a sound that summoned people to work and signaled when they could take a break and when the workday ended. Failure to abide by the whistle's command meant discipline in the form of loss of wages or dismissal. I remember hearing the whistle day and night at the glass factory in my hometown. Its piercing noise was set to the clock,

sounding at the shift changes: 8:00 a.m., 4:00 p.m., and midnight. Failure to be on time could be seen on the timecards each person had to punch when entering the enclosed spaces that were home for the next eight hours. A minute late might cost someone an hour's pay.

Dictating when work started and ended was a step forward in capital's rationalization of production. However, centralization soon gave rise to two radical changes in how work was done. When workers are confined, caged if you will, they can be observed, like pet birds. Management hired special personnel—later to be called industrial engineers—to observe what the workers did. Observation led to the insight that the task labor dominant in early capitalism could be broken down into component parts, with each one doled out to less-trained workers. When faced with a large order, craftsmen divided their tasks into subtasks so that the order could be filled more quickly. However, the same result could be achieved more cheaply if the subtasks were done by those paid much less than the craft worker. The idea was to always economize on the wage bill to the higher-wage employees, using them only for jobs others could not do. Thus, the detailed division of labor was born, termed by Harry Braverman the "Babbage Principle," after the man who first proposed it, the inventor Charles Babbage. Now control could be enforced by the easy substitution of one laborer with another. Craft personnel were difficult to replace, but this was not the case with those who performed simpler, repetitive details of a more complex task. Furthermore, by increasing the number of people who could do any given job, the detailed division of labor significantly increased what Marx called the reserve army of labor. This reserve of potential labor functioned as a brake on the power, and hence the wages, of all employees. Both Babbage and Andrew Ure (the other early proponent of detail work) noted that more women and children could be employed in place of adult men once this principle became widespread.[4]

Men, women, and children performing relatively repetitive, simpler tasks acted as a spur to the introduction of machinery, which,

once propelled by an independent power source, offered capital a potent means of control. The pace of work could be regulated by mechanical means, making labor, using Marx's famous phrase, into "appendages to the machine." Mechanization also sped up the degradation of work, as Harry Braverman and Harvard professor of business James Bright made clear. The latter correlated the degree of mechanization and a composite of work complexity. He found a strong inverse correlation between the two variables so that with the highest degree of mechanization, almost no job knowledge was required. Braverman, who incorporated Bright's work into his book *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism*, references an oil refinery personnel manager who placed an upper limit on the IQ scores of prospective machine operators, such that only those testing below this cutoff IQ would be hired. The work was so monotonous and routine that the employer felt that higher IQ workers would not be as productive as those with lower ones.[5]

Mechanization—today robotics and artificial intelligence come to mind—continuously eliminates jobs, which, by making workers fearful of unemployment, greatly aids the employer's ability to control the labor process. In the wake of COVID-19, employers have become more amenable to automating their workplaces. Machines don't get sick, they don't try to unionize, and they can reduce costs. Now, with growing labor shortages, fueled in part by an unprecedented number of workers quitting their jobs (see chapter 8), many in the service sector might be on the chopping block: "Employers seem eager to bring on the machines. A survey last year by the nonprofit World Economic Forum found that 43% of companies planned to reduce their workforce because of new technology. Since the second quarter of 2020, business investment in equipment has grown 26%, more than twice as fast as the overall economy."[6] One type of employment that could be adversely affected is in fast food. "Restaurants have been among the most visible robot adopters. In late August, the salad chain Sweetgreen announced it was buying the kitchen robotics startup Spyce, which makes a machine that cooks vegetables and grains

and spouts them into bowls."[7] Sweetgreen says that this will give its remaining workers "more time to focus on preparing food"![8] Watch the video linked in note 8 before you take this remark at face value. Ironically, celebrity chef Daniel Boulud is an investor in Spyce. Machines won't be mixing and pouring ingredients in his restaurants, however.

Frederick Taylor, the patron saint of industrial engineers, took what had already been done by capital in terms of control and systematized it. He developed three principles of what he termed "scientific management."[9] First, through close observation of the motions involved in each task and the time it takes to do each one, using stopwatches and cameras, the engineers could collect all the knowledge that had been in the hands and minds of the workers. The conceptualization of work would now be monopolized by capital. Second, each task would be "rationalized," that is, the motions would be reorganized so that the necessary time for the job was minimized. From the beginning, cameras were employed by industrial engineers, and today, often unseen closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras are ubiquitous in workplaces and cities and towns around the world. These allow employers to monitor their hired hands no matter where they labor: offices, banks, grocery stores, factories, warehouses, delivery, and other vehicles, classrooms, any building, retail outlets, homes, even construction, and road repair sites.[10] There may be fifty or more CCTVs in a large grocery store. Smartphones can be used to compel workers to self-monitor, noting delivery times and anything else the boss demands. For example, Amazon issues Inpax hand scanners to monitor its drivers' work as they deliver packages and dictate the routes they drive.[11] Algorithms and related apps can direct those who shop for others to minimize the time they traverse a grocery store's aisles or make deliveries. Amazon warehouses provide an extreme example: an algorithm dictates the flow of goods from one aisle to another so that workers never intersect, thus minimizing contact among them. It is almost as if each worker in a space that might employ hundreds of people is working alone.[12]

There were (and are) numerous standard motions, with standard times, so direct observation is often no longer needed. These motions were named "therbligs," after the husband-and-wife engineering team Frank and Lillian Gilbreth (their name spelled backwards). For example, room attendants in hotels and motels make certain similar movements as they clean a room. Hidden cameras can easily capture these, and then industrial engineers can note the standard motions (removing a pillowcase, for example) and look up the standard time for this. A total time per room is then calculated, and, based on this, each attendant is expected to be able to clean a certain number of rooms in a shift.

Finally, every employee would be given detailed instructions to be followed precisely each time a task was performed. Braverman has a telling account of what was really going on here, namely that workers would be sped up, and those who could not keep pace would be fired. It is well worth reading Braverman on "Schmidt," the man Taylor directed to load pig iron at a speed four times faster than had been standard. If the new rate could be maintained and wages rose by less than four times, unit labor costs would fall.[13] This is simply speed-up masquerading as science. Karen and I met a room attendant at a chain hotel in Albuquerque, New Mexico, who told us that she was expected to clean twenty-nine rooms a day. Ironically, in Las Vegas, Nevada, where most hotel labor is unionized, attendants had to clean only fifteen rooms each day. In addition, they worked in pairs to reduce the likelihood of being sexually assaulted by customers.

Let me add here that scholars writing about work are often ignorant of what a job entails. Braverman tells us that famed sociologist Daniel Bell, in his description of the labor Schmidt was performing, had not the slightest idea what a pig of iron is. Similarly, Nobel Laureate in Economics Joseph Stiglitz seems unaware of all the monitoring and control that employers use, all the time, on as many employees as possible. He hypothesized that one reason for unemployment is that some employers chose to pay above-equilibrium wages—which, according to neoclassical economic theory, causes

unemployment—because they could not effectively oversee those they hired. The higher wage would keep unmonitored employees productive. On average, workers have endured stagnant wages for nearly fifty years, with wages badly lagging productivity increases. So, which companies are paying these higher wages? And hasn't Stiglitz ever heard of Frederick Taylor and his progeny? No doubt, he hasn't been to many workplaces. Had he gone to those modern automobile plants Ben Hamper called gulags or an Amazon warehouse, hopefully he would have seen how foolish his theory is.

Taylor's ideas have been thoroughly implemented by corporate management worldwide; today, they are built into the design of the products themselves. There is even "financial engineering," with courses of this name given in engineering schools. And like any successful practice, it has been further developed since Taylor's time. The Toyota Corporation pioneered what is now called "lean production," termed accurately by critics "management by stress."[14] There are many aspects of this "improvement" on Taylorism:

- **Systematic Hiring:** Prospective employees must go through a rigorous set of interviews and tests, presumably to see if they qualify for the job. In truth, employers want to have a psychological profile of each person to determine whether he or she will be amenable to working in teams, if they have sufficient physical strength and dexterity to perform the required tasks, if they can work fast, or if they might vote for a union. Today, metadata are available from various companies, and these, along with searches of social media accounts, can yield enormous amounts of information about employee behavior. These can guide businesses in their hiring decisions. And once hired, data from emails and various programs used by workers to communicate with one another can allow employers to assess conduct that may be inimical to corporate control.[15] Incredible amounts of information are being constantly collected about all of us. It would be surprising if employers did not try to access as much of this as they need to control their workforces.

- **Team Production:** Capitalists are aware that, contrary to the precepts of neoclassical economics with its fetish of individual choices, production is always done by collectivities of workers. The Toyota Production System sought to turn this fact to its advantage. Workers are termed "associates" and placed in small groups responsible for some part of a production process. As in the military, the idea is to get team members to commit to one another in a perverse solidarity. Soldiers don't kill for the glory of their country but to protect their buddies. Similarly, workers will do the same to get the job done. Corporate loyalty is encouraged, even by group exercises and singing before forming into teams and getting to work.[16] Teams are expected to solve problems on their own. At one plant, team members were taught to time-study themselves and then, in effect, speed up their labors to attain greater efficiency. Frederick Taylor would have smiled from the grave if he could have seen this. The employees were compelled to see themselves as objects to be manipulated and made to function in a machine-like fashion. Some enjoyed it, thinking they were learning a new skill.

- **Cross-Training:** It is often assumed that working in the modern economy requires much knowledge and training. We have seen in previous chapters that this is not usually the case. With lean production, every job is Taylorized in advance of the advent of production. This means that the expertise needed for as many jobs as possible has been reduced to a minimum. Suppose that in a team, someone is absent from work. The other team members have to take up the slack, so they have been trained to do a variety of unchanging subtasks. This is not multiskilling as we might typically think of it. Consider the job of machinist, which of all blue-collar occupations requires the most training. It takes an apprenticeship lasting a few years to learn how to fashion a machine part by making complex and high tolerance cuts in a piece of metal. With numerically controlled machines, however, the knowledge of the machinist has been transferred to

a computer program, which then controls the mechanism that performs the cuts. To learn to operate it takes no more than a few weeks. Imagine then how few hours are needed to learn to do a set of routine details. The real purpose of cross-training is to maintain high production volumes with fewer workers if necessary.

- **Just-in-Time Inventory:** Firms employing modern-day Taylorism contract out as much labor as possible. For example, an automobile plant can lower its production costs in terms of wages, machinery, and space by subcontracting the production of steering mechanisms. A nearby plant, built for just this purpose, will hire workers at a rate less than that of the central plant where automobiles are assembled. Sometimes, this occurs with the cooperation of the labor union, which even if it manages to organize the subcontractor's workers will accept wages lower than at the assembly plant—to assemble the steering mechanism. These mechanisms will be delivered "just-in-time," that is, only as needed by the main factory, with deliveries made several times a day. Thus, no inventory is kept in reserve, saving space. In some cases, it is even possible that the subcontractor can contract out some of its work to peripheral firms at still lower costs. Here managerial control is enhanced by the splitting of the automobile workforce.[17]

  The just-in-time concept can be applied to employees as well. The reference to the scheduling program in the following quote refers to a software program that uses an algorithm to show businesses how to best allocate hours of work:

  > Today, just-in-time inventory is applied to workers themselves. Rather than assuming the utilization of someone for a week or even a day, scheduling is based upon an analysis of how many total work hours are likely to be needed during any particular hour or set of hours during a shift. If the scheduling program

> tells you that for an eight-hour shift, seven workers are needed for the first three and the last three hours but 10 are needed for the two-hour period around lunch time, then you will use 10 workers only for those two hours. Employees may be scheduled for two-hour workdays, or "on-call" personnel may be asked to come in.[18]

It has become more common for work to be subcontracted out of a country. Global supply chains now link far-flung dependent enterprises to a central corporation, almost always located in the rich nations of the Global North. Firms in the Global South that supply production parts use the various control mechanisms discussed in this chapter, as do their counterparts in the Global North. Workers in poor countries then bear the brunt of managerial control, which is often combined with physical violence perpetrated by public and private police. Ruthless cost reduction is critical for managers of workplaces in the Global South, given that competition for the business of the central corporations is intense, as is the work intensity itself.[19]

- **Kaizen:** This is a Japanese word meaning "constant improvement." In lean production, productivity is relentlessly pressured upward. Kaizen can be best understood in connection with team production, cross-training, and just-in-time inventory. First, production is stressed. An assembly line's speed might be increased, a team member might be eliminated, or a shortage of needed material might suddenly appear. The stress will be great enough that a production bottleneck will eventually become apparent. This will force a warning signal to appear. There might be a system of lights along a line, with green meaning all is well, yellow showing that there is a problem, and red signaling a complete breakdown. Stress will continue until the lights turn yellow. A manager will run to the team and insist that the workers find a solution to get the lights green again. At

> one plant, the warning light was accompanied by the playing of "Mary had a little lamb" over and over. Workers will have to move faster, do a missing person's subtask, or somehow find materials. Woe to them if the line has to be shut down, even though companies say that employees have the power to shut down the line if they see a safety hazard or possible destruction of equipment. What makes kaizen so insidious is that it is never-ending. It is simply a continuous work-intensification scheme camouflaged as something more benign, namely that workers are empowered by it.

Lean production is integral to most kinds of employment, from factories to offices to colleges and universities. In tech industries, it is hidden by perquisites that make it appear that where you work is like a home. Free catered meals, gyms, massage tables, games made being at work enjoyable. But they also kept people at work for long hours. The internet kept them on call all day and night as well. In higher education, lean production has taken the form of minimizing the number of tenure-stream faculty by hiring part-time adjunct teachers, who now teach the majority of classes. (Once granted tenure, professors have permanent employment and can be discharged only for cause. An exception might be if the college faced financial distress.) Adjuncts are utilized "just-in-time," often not knowing if they will have classes to teach until just before a semester begins. If enrollments aren't high enough, the course is canceled. Faculty are required to provide a detailed summary of their productivity every year, which amounts to a time study of themselves. The universal use of internet-based communication programs has meant that lectures, syllabi, and notes must be placed online, becoming the employer's property. Professors are on-call with students and administrators, with barrages of emails coming in every day. Matters have only worsened with pandemic-induced distance learning.

All the managerial control mechanisms generate stress for workers. Kaizen ruins bodies (which include our minds). Alienation is

the result, brutal and widespread. Imagine spending your day working at an Amazon warehouse, a panopticon if ever there was one:

> [Darryl Richardson] complained about the fast, unrelenting pace of work and about seeing co-workers terminated for falling behind Amazon's production quotas. As a picker, Richardson takes merchandise out of large metal bins that robots carry to his workstation, and he then hurries to put the items in various totes that a conveyor belt takes to packing. Nearby video monitors tell him what to do minute after minute. His quota is to pick 315 items an hour, five items a minute: toilet paper and toys, baby food and books destined for Amazon customers. "You're running at a consistent, fast pace," Richardson said. "You ain't got time to look around. You get treated like a number. You don't get treated like a person. They work you like a robot."[20]

Owner Jeff Bezos is aware of the toll this work takes on the workers' limbs. But rather than change the insane work regimen, his solution illustrates just how indifferent capital is to what the labor process has become. He says, "We're developing new automated staffing schedules that use sophisticated algorithms to rotate employees among jobs that use different muscle-tendon groups to decrease repetitive motion and help protect employees from MSD [musculoskeletal disorders] risks. This new technology is central to a job rotation program that we're rolling out throughout 2021." It's hard to know whether to laugh or cry at this, especially given that in this same article he also says his goal is to make Amazon "Earth's Best Employer and Earth's Safest Place to Work."[21]

The managerial control methods discussed so far are integral to the workplace. However, capital also uses consumers to enhance its control. As corporate methods have become the rule in higher education, students are considered consumers. Management encourages them to think of their professors as simply purveyors of a product they purchase, no different in principle than a fast-food sandwich or something ordered from Amazon. They are given the right to

evaluate their teachers, and the latter are expected to encourage this. Student evaluations then become part of the employer's arsenal of control devices. Poor evaluations can spell the end of a teacher's career, especially those whose employment is precarious to begin with, such as adjuncts and untenured full-time teachers. There are also websites not run by the colleges, such as RateMyProfessors, that serve the same function.

Given that evaluations are anonymous, students are free to say anything. This generates fear among the teachers, and this fear helps control how they teach and what they profess. Those hostile to higher education, believing it to be dominated by left-wing ideologues, are on the lookout for anything that smacks of heterodox thinking. They will encourage students to spy on their professors, give them bad ratings, and urge that they be dismissed.

For workers who provide services, customer comment platforms such as Yelp are ubiquitous. Consumers are urged to evaluate the competence of automobile mechanics, waiters, hotel clerks, retail employees, delivery drivers, Uber drivers, medical practitioners, and many others. Employers can then use these ratings to discipline and thus control their workers. Political scientist Joshua Sperber calls this constant monitoring a "digital panopticon."[22] Workers are always being watched, and they never know what will result in a negative customer review.

The managerial control mechanisms discussed in this chapter do not form an exhaustive list, and it is essential to understand that underlying them is always the threat of force. Some workers might be fired or demoted to teach others that they must submit to the employer's power. Private detectives and electronic snooping can be used to get useful information about the private lives of employees. If a union comes on the scene, workers can be convinced to spy on it and report back to management.[23] Workplaces are always embedded in larger social structures, which usually work to strengthen managerial control. There are thousands of examples of police and military forces breaking strikes, often with ample violence. The laws, including labor statutes, protect the rights of

property owners above all others, with various labor boards and courts interpreting the laws in ways favorable to capital. Rarely do media offer robust and unyielding support to workers, which is not surprising since typically these are capitalist enterprises. In the United States, the Constitution might protect public employees against the depredations of their employers, but for private-sector workers, this is rarely the case.[24]

Managerial control aims to create a labor process in which the one active element, human labor power, is as limited as possible in its ability to interfere with capital accumulation. Businesses want the same predictability that can be expected from machines. If X-amount of labor power is hired, then Y-amount of output will be produced. This formula implies that workers must be conceived as machine-like parts that are combined with other, inanimate entities to yield the product. How could this be anything but alienating? It is profoundly anti-human. It is not just that employers exploit labor. Rather, they consume workers, and in the process, deaden them. And when no more can be taken by capital, shells of human beings are simply disposed of, and fresh new ones put to work.

6

A Divided Working Class

A book about work cannot ignore what have always been fundamental divisions within the working class. These vary from country to country. In every nation, there is a gender divide, with men more likely than women to hold positions on the upper rungs of the job ladder. Race and ethnicity are the other major splits among those who labor. Black labor in the United States, for example, has always been valued much less than white, as has that of Hispanic workers. The same is true throughout the Western Hemisphere and in much of Europe as well. There are other critical divisions, such as religion. Under the neofascist Modi government, Muslims are being persecuted in India, while Hindus have been elevated to the pinnacles of power and status. There are, of course, splits within each racial, ethnic, gender, and religious group. However, in this chapter, the focus will be on the broad differences, emphasizing racial, ethnic, and gender disparities.[1]

Race

The United States is the paradigmatic country for racial divisions in the working class. What is true there is ipso facto true,

to some degree at least, everywhere there is a racial hierarchy. Several recent books have demonstrated with unique power that the nation's development into a global economic juggernaut owed everything to the brutal and murderous exploitation of Black slave labor.[2] And as the long history, right to the present day, of police and vigilante violence against Black people has shown with great clarity, the racial chasm lives on. A few Black men and women have climbed into the 1 percent, and a sizable African American middle class now exists. But by every measure of social well-being, Black Americans fare much worse than their white counterparts. Just as for the economic, political, and social distance between capitalists and workers, so too a differential exists between Black and white people, for these same interconnected components of daily life continue because of the way our system is structured.

In *Inequality and Power: The Economics of Class*, economist Eric Schutz suggests that as we make individual decisions, we, at the same time, make "social choices."[3] These choices structure the larger society, which in turn conditions our individual decisions. Our political system is a case in point. U.S. prosperity was founded on slavery, the dominant mode of production in the southern states and tightly integrated into northern capitalism. The slave trade, the production of essential commodities, especially cotton, the textile industry, shipping, construction, agricultural implements, banking, finance, and many other economic activities were intimately tied to, indeed dependent on, slavery.

The slave economy was supported by a constellation of laws and enforced by violence that maintained the entire oppressive system. Who enacted these laws? That is, were the "social choices" that allowed, defended, and maintained slavery made by everyone equally, or were the choices of some weighted more heavily than those of others? No rational person could argue in 1789, the year the U.S. Constitution was enacted, that political equality existed in the United States. Slaves had no political power, and even among those who were not slaves, women could not vote, and, in many states, whites had to own property to cast a ballot. Black people

in the North were nominally free but subject to extreme race and class discrimination. In short, politics was dominated by white, male property owners who shaped the government decisively to serve their interests, including by maintaining and reproducing the institution of slavery. By the time slavery ended, income and wealth inequalities had reached the point that white male power was thoroughly entrenched and difficult to unseat. What this white male elite wrought was equally hard to change. Slavery ended, but the institutional setting in which it flourished did not.

Consider the conditions of Black America at the end of the Civil War and especially after the end of Reconstruction in 1877. Enslaved people were freed but given no property, not even small plots of land so that they could feed their families. Without wealth or income, they had to fend for themselves. Federal soldiers protected them to a degree, but when the troops left after the 1876 presidential election, they fell victim once again to their white masters, who regained control of southern state governments and passed the Jim Crow laws that created a system of apartheid that dominated the South for nearly one hundred years. These states gave full sanction to white vigilantism, which stood ready to murder Black people who refused to succumb to white rule. White mobs were lynching Black persons well into the 1960s. Through new laws that criminalized everyday activities, the white rulers of the South filled the prisons with Black workers. They then contracted them out to white business owners, creating what a Public Broadcasting System documentary called "slavery by another name."[4]

If a group of people begins life with little income and no wealth, they are not likely to fare well economically. Modern research on economic mobility teaches us that it is not nearly as great in the land of opportunity as most people think. What matters most is how well-off your parents are, mainly how much wealth they have. The children of poor parents are much less likely to end up rich than those whose parents are rich. Perhaps as much as 60 percent of the parents' income advantage is passed along to their

children.[5] So, a person's great-great-grandparents' wealth confers an advantage upon them today. By the same token, the poverty of your great-great-grandparents will haunt you now. Compound this intergenerational income and wealth effect with the impact of slavery and the "social choices" that whites made, nearly all of which created a society in which former slaves and their descendants were marginalized and barely considered human. Here is how I put it in something I once wrote:

> Imagine my own great-great-grandfather and suppose he had been a Black slave in Mississippi. He would have been denied education, had his family destroyed, been worked nearly to death, suffered severe privation during the Civil War, and been considered less than human. Then in 1865 he would have been "freed," to fend for himself and whatever family he had. No job, no land, no schools, no nothing. For twelve short years, he might have had some protection provided by the federal government against the murderous rage of white southerners. But in 1877 even that ended, and afterward he would have been confronted with the full force of Jim Crow and the Ku Klux Klan. What chance would his children have had? How likely would they have been to catch up with their white overlords? Isn't zero the most likely probability? His grandchildren might have migrated north, but again with no wealth and not much schooling. His great-grandchildren would have lived through the Great Depression. How much property would they have been likely to accumulate? Finally, through the heroic struggle of my ancestors and my own generation, I would have seen the victories of the civil rights movement, the desegregation of the schools, the end of lynchings, and the opening up of a few decent jobs. I might have been an auto worker in Detroit for a dozen years, but then in the 1970s everything would have come crashing down again.[6]

Let us look at some data that shows that Black workers fare significantly worse than their white counterparts:

- **Income:** In 1947, the median Black family income was 51.1 percent of white family income. In 2017, it was 59.1 percent. After the heroic struggles of the civil rights movement and the enactment of numerous civil rights laws, this seems a small gain, and the 2017 ratio is lower than that of 1969, when it was 61.3 percent.[7]
- **Wealth:** In 2016, the median net worth (all assets, including homes, minus all debts) of Black households (not necessarily a family) was $12,920, 9 percent of that of whites, for whom it was $143,600.[8]
- **Wages and jobs:** Black workers earn less than their white counterparts; Black men, for example, earn less than three-quarters the wages of white men. The black-white earnings disparity is present at every level of schooling. This is partly because Black people, no matter their level of schooling, are overrepresented in jobs with relatively low wages and underrepresented in higher-paying jobs. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2019, of all those employed in management, professional, and related occupations, the highest-paying major occupation group, 79 percent were white, compared to 9.6 percent of Black workers.

Another part of the reason for the relatively low wages of Black people is that they earn less money within the same occupations. A summary of data collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that "in 2010, median usual weekly earnings of white people ($1,273) working full time in management, professional, and related occupations (the highest-paying major occupation group) were well above the earnings of…Black men ($957) in the same occupation group." The numbers were $932 for white women and $812 for Black women.

Racial wage discrepancies exist in every occupational category. If instead of specific occupations, we look just at low-wage work, we find similar racial disparities. Of all jobs held by whites in the United States in 2013, 22.5 percent paid a wage that, for full-time,

year-round work, would put a family of four below the poverty level of income. But for jobs held by Black workers, this figure was 35.7 percent. I could not find more recent data for jobs and poverty income using a family of four for the poverty threshold. However, if we use a threshold based on actual family size, we still get a rate much higher for Black than for white jobholders.[9]

Black workers are much more likely to be poor and suffer unemployment than are whites. In 2018, the poverty rate for whites was 8.1 percent; for Black people, it was 20.8 percent. The percentage of Black people living at less than one-half of the poverty level was 9.4 percent; for non-Hispanic whites, it was 3.9 percent.[10] The same is true for unemployment, with Blacks typically showing double the rate of whites. These are further signs that the Black working class fares worse than does the white working class.

What is true for Black employees is also the lot of many ethnic minorities. In the U.S. West, for example, Hispanic workers are vastly overrepresented as motel and hotel room attendants, lawn care workers, kitchen laborers, farmworkers, packing house employees, and most other poorly paid jobs. There are numerous ethnic groups globally, and there are clear differences in how ethnic groups fare. Han Chinese discriminate against Uighurs. Indigenous people everywhere are treated as second-class citizens, unworthy of the dignity others expect as a matter of course. Kurds face mistreatment from Arabs and Iranians. The same can be said for nationality. Palestinians suffer horrible abuse at the hands of Israelis. Germans mistreat Turkish guest workers. Haitians are urged and sometimes compelled to leave the Dominican Republic. Mexican immigrants in the United States often toil as farm laborers for subsistence wages. The inferior position of these subordinate groups is often built into a nation's institutional structure, translating into long-term inferior economic and social outcomes for those who must endure it.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought inequalities within the working class into sharp focus. Those with higher incomes were much more likely to work from home. Others were not so fortunate.

Several months into the pandemic, stories about "frontline workers" filled the media.

By May 2020, 41.2 percent of frontline workers were people of color. These employees are overrepresented in low-wage occupations such as building cleaning services, childcare, social services, bus drivers, transit workers, and warehouse laborers. This is also true for "most of the top 10 occupations in Trucking, Warehouse, and Postal Service; most of the top 10 occupations in Building Cleaning Services; all of the top 10 occupations in Health Care, except registered nurses, physicians, managers, and secretaries and administrative; four of the top 10 occupations in Child Care and Social Services (child care workers, personal care aides, social workers, and nursing assistants)."[11] There are large numbers of immigrants in these jobs and in groceries, home healthcare, janitorial services, and domestic labor (maids and housekeepers, for example). Most of these workers have no or limited benefits, and many have childcare responsibilities.

Gender

For a social system to survive, women must give birth to children and nurture them. For children to become adults, they must be cared for by their parents, other adults, and the larger society. One way that societies can be described is by the degree of patriarchy. For most of our time on earth, we produced and distributed life's necessities without a rigid hierarchy, in gathering and hunting bands. Classes did not exist, and egalitarian relations of production prevailed. Patriarchy, though not nonexistent, was mild by comparison with what followed. In precapitalist class societies, patriarchy was more pronounced. However, women were an integral part of production. The bodies of women who were enslaved in colonial societies were expropriated by white male slaveowners, raped and used for breeding an increasing supply of their human chattel. Yet women were at the center of enslaved families and worked side-by-side with men in the fields. In feudal society, as

in all peasant communities, women and men jointly produced the household needs and the goods that had to be transferred as rent to their lords. To an outside observer, these arrangements would be transparent.

Matters changed dramatically with capitalism. Before the advent of factories, production was still a family enterprise, carried on in the artisan's home. Once factory production began, employers began to employ women and children, which wore down the bodies of the new factory hands and disrupted families, making it nearly impossible to maintain social life. As philosopher and social scientist Nancy Fraser tells us, in analyzing the changes wrought by capitalism:

> One is the epistemic shift from production to social reproduction—the forms of provisioning, caregiving and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds. Variously called "care," "affective labour," or "subjectivation," this activity forms capitalism's human subjects, sustaining them as embodied natural beings, while also constituting them as social beings, forming their habitus and the socio-ethical substance, or *Sittlichkeit*, in which they move. Central here is the work of socializing the young, building communities, producing and reproducing the shared meanings, affective dispositions and horizons of value that underpin social cooperation. In capitalist societies much, though not all, of this activity goes on outside the market, in households, neighbourhoods and a host of public institutions, including schools and childcare centres; and much of it, though not all, does not take the form of wage labour. Yet social-reproductive activity is absolutely necessary to the existence of waged work, the accumulation of surplus value and the functioning of capitalism as such. Wage labour could not exist in the absence of housework, child-raising, schooling, affective care and a host of other activities which help to produce new generations of workers and replenish existing ones, as well as to maintain social bonds and shared understandings. Much like "original accumulation,"

> therefore, social reproduction is an indispensable background condition for the possibility of capitalist production.[12]

In the early factory system, women and children were so severely exploited that the labor supply faced diminution. Along with social protest, the shrinking workforce eventually led to laws limiting child labor and the kinds of work women could do. A sharp separation took shape between production and social reproduction, with men the family's primary breadwinners and women relegated to overseers of the household. What the women did was essential to the production of wage laborers; without it, capital accumulation was impossible. Yet, they became increasingly invisible. In effect, capital had expropriated their labor, obtaining it free of charge, lowering production costs. With this split came an ethos that professed the naturalness of women's subordination to men. Religious ideologues pronounced this the will of God, and laws sanctioned it. Women typically could not own property or vote.

Women, especially those who were poor, never stopped working for wages. However, they faced considerable labor market discrimination and hostility from male co-workers. They were subject to sexual abuse as well. Men too often believed that women's place was in the home, bearing and raising children. The critical social reproduction labor women performed, whether they worked for wages or not, was debased and degraded, even as it was expropriated by capital. Women not in the labor force also became members of the reserve army of labor, drawn into the labor force when needed and expelled when not. It is interesting to read propaganda glorifying the role of women during the Second World War. The heroic image of Rosie the Riveter portrayed women as strong and capable of doing work that had previously been the province of men. But when the war ended, they were expelled from the workforce and expected to resume their role as homemakers.[13]

As with the Black and ethnic components of the working class, women are much more likely to occupy low-wage and inferior-status jobs. Women wage earners are still concentrated in the service

sector (with nearly 1.7 billion service workers worldwide), where wages are lower than in industry and the professions.[14] They earn less than men even in the same or similar jobs. A recent United Nations study found that "once in the paid labor force, women everywhere find themselves earning less than men for the same types of work; engaging more frequently in unskilled, low-wage labor; or spending less time in income-generating work and more time in unpaid caregiving work at home."[15] Women are also less likely to be literate than men, do more reproductive labor than men, whether in the labor force or not, are less likely than men to have access to healthcare, suffer many more sexual assaults in their homes and workplaces, more often than not lack maternity leave, and are discouraged in school from studying mathematics and science.[16]

The pandemic has laid bare the precarious position of working-class women. Many of the world's "own-account" (see chapter 3) laborers and their unpaid family members are women. They were devastated by the loss of employment, and they received little help from governments. In the United States, the massive layoffs at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak hit women particularly hard. Monitoring online schooling for children while doing their jobs and caring for the household has taken a considerable toll on women's health and overall well-being. In a summary of a report by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), BLS economist Eleni X. Karageorge tells us:

> First, the crisis has battered industry sectors in which women's employment is more concentrated—restaurants and other retail establishments, hospitality, and health care. This was not the case in past recessions, which tended to hurt male-dominated industry sectors like manufacturing and construction more than other industries. In past recessions, men have faced greater risk of unemployment than women, partly because of the gender composition of different sectors of the economy. A larger fraction of employed men (46 percent) than employed women

(24 percent) work in construction; manufacturing; and trade, transportation, and utilities. These are considered highly cyclical sectors that typically suffer during "normal" recessions. On the other hand, 40 percent of all working women are employed in government and in health and education services compared with just 20 percent of working men.

Second, the coronavirus shutdowns have closed schools and daycare centers around the country, keeping kids at home and making it even harder for parents (especially mothers who tend to provide the majority of childcare) to keep working. Childcare poses an additional challenge to working mothers during the pandemic.

Working women are also at a greater disadvantage compared with working men in the current crisis because fewer women have jobs that allow them to telecommute: 22 percent of female workers compared with 28 percent of male workers. According to the researchers' analysis of data from the American Time Use Survey from 2017 and 2018, single parents will face the greatest challenge. Only 20 percent of single parents reported being able to telecommute compared with 40 percent of married people with children. In two-parent households where only one parent works in the labor market, the stay-at-home parent, usually the mother, is likely to assume primary childcare duties during coronavirus-related school closures. However, in 44 percent of married couples with children, both spouses work full-time. Among these couples, mothers provide about 60 percent of childcare. Men perform 7.2 hours of childcare per week versus 10.3 hours for women.[17]

The multiple divisions within the working class show no signs of disappearing. Whatever has been done to end them has not worked. Both racism and patriarchy have seen a resurgence over the past few decades. They appear to have lives of their own, connected to but partially independent of class oppression. An analysis of necessary class struggle can be found in chapters 8 and 9, but in

this chapter we can say what won't work. Some on the left—a significant fraction of the Democratic Socialists in the United States, social democratic politicians like Bernie Sanders, some scholars, and various left-wing sects—have argued that race- and gender-conscious remedies, such as affirmative action, are bound to be divisive and should be abandoned in favor of class-based relief. For example, suppose it is argued that anyone serious about racial disparities should campaign to abolish our prison system, given that prisons are a key component of discriminatory social structures. However, those who focus single-mindedly on class have argued that "abolish the prison system" would be an unpopular plank in a radical movement's platform. It would likely alienate whites and quite a few Black people, so better to fight for something like full employment through a public jobs program. This approach would have a broad appeal, and though it is race neutral, it would have a more significant impact on Black workers since they have much higher unemployment rates. A similar logic can be applied to national health insurance or low-cost public housing. The idea is to fight for things that unite the working class.

However, this strategy of supposedly unifying the working class by purely economic means is inadequate. If it is true that the social choices made in the past have created racist and patriarchal structures, and if these have yet to be eradicated, it is necessary to confront these structures directly. If we had a full-employment jobs program, how would it eliminate the gap between Black and white wages and those between men and women, unless at the same time it is aimed disproportionately at Black workers and women? If we do not aim to guarantee that Black people and women become leaders in our movements, then how will a full-employment program or national healthcare or public housing be implemented so that they do not disproportionately benefit white men, who, after all, hold most leadership positions in movements, both radical and not? Even if we were to make every element of the criminal justice system nondiscriminatory, how could we make sure that the enormous number of Black people enmeshed in this system now will

be able to extricate themselves from it and become full and equal citizens unless we have race-specific programs to help them?

Given the extent and depth of white privilege, racial issues should be addressed and attacked head-on. There is no easy way out. The working class will never be unified unless we confront the institutional racism that surrounds us now. Unity requires restitution for past and present damages, and nothing less will do. Racial and patriarchal attitudes are once again hardening, and from an already unenlightened base, and the optimism felt by those who wanted a racially- and gender-equal society has long ago vanished.

7

The Rise and Fall of the United Farm Workers

Previous chapters present a bleak picture of what it means to be a wage laborer. It might appear that managerial control is so tight and its effects on workers so harmful that resistance is not possible. However, capital's power is never absolute. The working class has always been rife with resistance. At the beginning of the capitalist system, the assault on traditional ways of life was so stark that craft laborers reacted to the attack on their culture with revolts, sometimes violent, as with the Luddites in England. Under the leadership of the mythical General Ludd, weavers destroyed power looms and the factories in which they were located. Organized riots were not uncommon in towns and cities.[1]

Once capital began to implement its workplace regime, it also created conditions that its employees could turn to their advantage. People do not see themselves as robotic and machine-like. They have consciousness and can think through what is happening to them. Humans have always resisted authority, whether it be that of the slaveowner or the feudal lord. We have lived most of our time on earth, more than 95 percent of it, in a production and distribution system—gathering and hunting—without

direct authority. We resisted all attempts to control us, and this long history has managed to live on.

Once herded into factories, workers came face-to-face with one another. They began to see themselves in others, realizing that they were in similar circumstances. It was a short step to grasp that as individuals they were powerless, but together they were not. Similarly, the detailed division of labor had the same effect, as did machinery, especially the system of connected machines we call an assembly line. It is challenging to maintain a sense of personal power or difference when you are doing the identical detail labor as everyone else. Capital, in effect, creates a working class as it accumulates capital. It thereby opens the possibility of this class becoming not just an agglomeration of labor but a conscious and organized collective acting in opposition to the will of their employers.

One of the universal forms of opposition is the labor union.[2] Unions attempt to improve the wages, hours, and conditions of their members. They also act politically to do the same and sometimes struggle on behalf of all workers, becoming a labor movement. Organizing people into a union and building a movement are not easy tasks, and they often fail. However, the very effort to change things also changes the workers. Frederick Engels wrote:

> The working classes, in this agitation, found a mighty means to get acquainted with each other, to come to a knowledge of their social position and interests, to organize themselves and to know their strength. The working man, who has passed through such an agitation, is no longer the same as he was before; and the whole working class, after passing through it, is a hundred times stronger, more enlightened, and better organized than it was at the outset.[3]

Although this is true, capitalism is a hegemonic system. It will

always respond to every conflict with labor so that its power is restored. It will infiltrate every corner of the earth and every part of our lives. Labor unions, their leaders, and the members will be no exception.

DURING THE WINTER and spring of 1977, I worked for the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) in Keene, California, a tiny, barely populated "census designated place" in the foothills of the Tehachapi Mountains. On a narrow road not far past the Keene Café was La Paz, the union's headquarters. I lived in a small room at La Paz, in what had once been a sanatorium for tuberculosis patients. I had a variety of jobs: researching the growers who owned the farms where the UFW's members labored; testifying in two critical legal cases brought under the 1975 California Agricultural Labor Relations Act; writing a collective bargaining manual for the union's negotiators; constructing a piece-rate wage proposal for workers in Oxnard, California; and doing whatever else union president César Chávez asked me to do.[4]

The UFW is a famous labor union. César Chávez is an almost mythical figure, with more than 125 roads, highways, clinics, schools at all levels, libraries, parks, and monuments named after him. The union organized thousands of farm laborers, mainly in the 1960s,'70s, and '80s. It did this in the face of police and grower brutality, an often violent confrontation with a rival union, the Teamsters, which employers heavily supported, and a migrant and therefore difficult to unionize labor force. In its patient and relentless efforts, the UFW utilized, with remarkable success, legendary boycotts of key agricultural products like grapes and lettuce, strikes, pickets, hunger strikes by the charismatic Chavez, and an enormous cadre of volunteers, supporters, and union members. Given the abysmal conditions under which farmworkers toiled in the fields, their isolation in labor camps that were difficult for organizers to access, their poor health (life expectancy was less than fifty years of age), and

a long history of heroic but failed efforts to form a viable union, what the UFW achieved was amazing.

The union brought a sea change in the working conditions of some of the nation's most exploited workers. No longer could workers be routinely harassed and fired; no longer could they be denied water and toilets in the fields; no longer could they be forced to use the physically debilitating short-handled hoe; no longer could labor contractors cheat them; no longer would they have no paid holidays or vacations; no longer would they be denied medical care because now they had access to union-built health clinics; and so much more. In the early 1980s, lettuce harvesting crew members were earning the 2021 equivalent of more than $60 an hour.[5]

If ever a union gave hope for the rebuilding and expansion of the U.S. labor movement, it was the UFW. If farmworkers could build a strong and enduring union, defeating the rulers of the most powerful industry in the richest state in the country, then which workers could not be unionized?[6] The union seemed to epitomize what class struggle is all about. Chavez even appeared poised to begin developing a movement, one to which unions could belong, one that would seek to radically change society itself.

Sadly, right when the union was at its peak, it unraveled. Most commentators have blamed outside forces, especially the rightward shift in state and national politics. Few wanted to point a critical finger at César Chávez and his leadership, along with that of some of his closest allies in the union, such as Delores Huerta. However, the union's demise—it has lost most of its membership and is no longer a force to be reckoned with by employers—was caused mainly by what went on inside the union. This chapter, which reviews a book by Miriam Pawel, with added commentary by this writer, may help readers see how difficult it is to construct a class-struggle union that seeks to end both exploitation and managerial control, much less build a radical movement.[7]

After reading *The Union of Their Dreams*, Miriam Pawel's exceptional account of the rise and fall of the United Farm Workers Union, I reread an article I wrote for *The Nation* in November 1977. In "A Union Is Not a Movement," I leveled harsh criticism at the UFW and its famous leader, César Chávez. In response, the union's chief counsel, Jerry Cohen, one of the major characters in Pawel's book, threatened suit against the magazine. At the time, I was upset, thinking maybe I should have been more careful in what I said. However, as Pawel's book makes clear, I need not have been concerned since everything I said was true. And then some.

Nearly every book written about the UFW has placed César Chávez front and center, and most of them have portrayed him as a cross between Gandhi and Jesus Christ.[8] Chavez appeared on the scene, say these books, and everything changed. He did what no one had ever managed: he built a strong union of the poorest of the poor—migrant farmworkers. Pawel's book has the great virtue of not making Chavez its main protagonist. Instead, she effectively uses the journalistic technique of telling the story of the UFW through the eyes of several key participants—none of them Chavez—in the struggle to build the union. He is, as he must be, always present in the book. But, by focusing on the lives and actions of others, Pawel both demythologizes César Chávez and shows that he was but one of many talented and dedicated people who made UFW history.

The book's eight protagonists are Eliseo Medina, the Mexican-born farmworker who became a brilliant organizer and all-round union mastermind; Chris Hartmire, Chavez stalwart, Protestant minister, and head of the California Migrant Ministry, which he converted into an arm of the UFW; Ellen Eggers, who joined the union boycott crusade, became a UFW attorney, and later an advocate for death row inmates; Gretchen Laue, who joined the boycott in Boston more or less by accident and went on to become a union organizer; the aforementioned Jerry Cohen, who, while learning on the fly, became one of the best labor lawyers in the United States, developing the many innovative legal tactics that

helped build the UFW; Sandy Nathan, Cohen's right-hand man and a resourceful lawyer and negotiator in his own right; and rank-and-file farmworkers Sabino Lopez and Mario Bustamante, whose rise and fall inside the UFW illustrate as well as anything the mixed legacy of César Chávez.

Pawel conducted extensive interviews with these eight key sources and many others as well. She uses their words and her considerable research in both primary and secondary sources: letters, memoranda, notes, court files, newspaper stories, and diaries as well as six hundred hours of tapes of meetings, rallies, and interviews recorded between 1969 and 1980. From this material she weaves an exciting and original investigation into the spectacular growth and inglorious collapse of the union that was once the hope of the U.S. labor movement and that provided a formative experience for thousands of workers and hundreds of volunteers. I speak from experience: I worked as a volunteer for the UFW in the winter and spring of 1977, and I was profoundly influenced by what I witnessed there and the people I met.

What is most important about this book is that it puts people integral to the union's historical trajectory on record so that what they tell us can be compared to what has stood so far as the primary record: that of César Chávez. Instead of hearing only from him and those who have remained uncritically loyal to him, like the famed firebrand Delores Huerta, longtime Chavez secretary Mark Grossman, and current union president and Cesar's son-in-law Arturo Rodríquez (who stepped down in 2018 and was replaced by Teresa Romero, the first Latina and immigrant woman president of a U.S. national union), we hear the voices of men and women who have complex, nuanced views of the union and Chavez's role in it. Thus, Pawel gives us a more complete picture of the UFW. Whether Pawel intends it, she also gives plenty of ammunition to those of us whose attitude toward Chavez is, on balance, negative.

The first part of the book vividly captures the remarkable and exciting story of the rise of the UFW, from its beginnings in grape

strikes, nationwide boycotts, the activation of thousands of idealistic and passionate lay and religious volunteers, the sweetheart contracts signed by the growers with the Teamsters, beatings, jailings, Cesar's fasts and marches, and the recruitment and astounding development of one of the best labor legal staffs in the country, to the passage of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act in 1975, the most protective labor law for farmworkers in the country. This section of the book brought back the excitement and moral certainty I felt when I first learned of and began participating in the farmworkers' struggle for justice in the fields. Pawel captures the impact of the UFW's epic efforts on so many of us when she writes of the young Eliseo Medina joining the union in 1965, amid the first grape strike:

> The shy teenager from Zacatecas with a shock of dark hair tended to deliberate carefully before acting. Once he made a decision, Eliseo embraced the path with focused enthusiasm and a big, contagious grin. He went home after the meeting at the church and cracked open his piggy bank. He didn't know what a contract was, but he counted out ten dollars and fifty cents. The next day, he drove to the headquarters at 102 Albany Street, handed three months' dues to Helen Chavez, and joined her husband's union.

And Ellen Eggers, a few years later, when she decides to commit herself to the union:

> Ellen called her mother and sobbed as she explained the importance of the union's struggle and why she had to stay. Ten years from now, she reasoned, she would not remember whether she went back to see her nephew and her boyfriend. But she would always remember if she left when the movement needed her to stay.

In the early chapters, Pawel throws out hints of the troubles to come, and she doesn't hesitate to suggest that they were rooted

in the personality and politics of César Chávez. There are signs that Chavez would brook no opposition, that he was often petty and vindictive, and that he did not believe the words of Eugene Debs: "I do not want to rise above the working class; I want to rise with them." Chavez's attitude toward the workers he led is reflected in a famous statement, quoted many times, almost always with approval: "I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of humanness, is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally nonviolent struggle for justice. To be truly alive is to suffer for others. God help us to be truly alive!"

He would suffer for the farmworkers, and by doing this, he would be alive. But what would happen if the workers saw things differently, if they wanted, not a Christ figure to lead them, but to lead the union themselves? What if, rather than eternally suffering, they wanted better lives, here and now? Once, in a community meeting at La Paz, the union's headquarters in the desert mountains east of Bakersfield, California, not accidentally a place far removed from where most farm laborers lived and worked, Chavez told us that a union supporter wanted to donate some washing machines for the union volunteers. Cesar said that he wasn't sure he should accept the gift because we probably wouldn't take care of them. We protested vigorously, telling him that we had to find a way up the mountain to Tehachapi to do laundry and that many volunteers didn't have money for this. Cesar scoffed and said this was all "chickenshit" and that he didn't do his laundry anyway, so he didn't care. His remarks elicited a loud chorus of boos for the sexist remark. He responded with narrowed eyes and said, "I work eighteen fucking hours a day for the union. Which of you can say the same?" He loved playing the martyr, and he used this to gain and keep power. Not that, with his numerous fasts and forced marches, he didn't actually suffer. But Jesus' suffering ended in death. Cesar kept living and could use his suffering over and over to silence his critics.

The tone changes dramatically in the second part of the book. Although the new Labor Relations law was slow to get off the

ground, eventually it worked to the UFW's advantage, and the union soon had thousands of new members. The law also succeeded in driving the Teamsters from the fields. When the growers were able to stall legislative funding for administration of the law by the Agricultural Labor Relations Board, Chavez decided to organize a massive campaign to put a ballot initiative before voters that would make Board funding part of the state's constitution. Money would never again be subject to the vagaries of Sacramento politics. Unfortunately, the UFW campaign was badly flawed, and it was easily defeated. Pawel suggests, and her sources imply, that the union would have been better served by devoting time and resources to winning union representation elections and securing collective bargaining agreements. Behind the scenes, however, Chavez had other fish to fry.

Most accounts of UFW history speculate that something happened to Chavez after the lost initiative, and he somehow went off the deep end. Indeed, bizarre and ugly things began to happen. He hatched a scheme with Chris Hartmire to start a new religious order, whose farmworkers and volunteer initiates would live by communal farming. He deepened his friendship with Charles Dederich, who had made his once successful drug rehabilitation organization, Synanon, into a cult. Dederich employed a technique he called "The Game" to break down the addicts' fragile personalities so that they could be more accessible to the forces of social control, particularly his control.

Chavez began taking his inner circle to Synanon for training, and he made "The Game" a centerpiece of union activities. After the lost initiative campaign, Chavez had begun to purge some key personnel, charging them with disloyalty, complicity with the growers, and communism. Then, at an infamous community meeting at La Paz, Game participants led a frenzied psychological attack on several volunteers, who were summarily kicked out of the union. After one volunteer protested vigorously during this "Monday Night Massacre," the union called the police and had him arrested and forcibly removed from the property. Several

resignations followed (a year and a half later, Eliseo Medina, the one person who might have challenged Chavez's leadership, left the union). From this point on, The Game would be a major weapon Chavez and his loyalists would use to consolidate power.

Most of the union's staff remained loyal to Chavez, and most participated in The Game, despite misgivings. They failed to see what was happening or did not care, believing that the cause was more important than the purges or that Chavez had inside information, and those forced out of the union deserved it. Some actively participated in the carnage. Others felt that as long as the purges did not interfere with what they were doing, they did not matter. Nearly all the staff would suffer the same fate as those who resigned or were kicked out of the union in what Chris Hartmire called Cesar's "cultural revolution."

The next few years saw the union becoming ever more dysfunctional, as Chavez repeatedly balked at any efforts to build a real union. On the surface, there were skirmishes between Chavez and staffers: Chavez and Medina; Chavez and Marshall Ganz, perhaps the union's best organizer; Chavez and Gilbert Padilla, one of the union's founders and with Chavez from the beginning; Chavez and Jerry Cohen and the legal staff; Chavez and Filipino farmworker leader Philip Vera Cruz.

There were various bones of contention: The Game; the fact that the attorneys and a couple of doctors received salaries and no one else did; Cesar's insistence that everyone live at La Paz; the disorganization of the union and Chavez's use of various management "gurus" to put the union house in order; Chavez's irrational nitpicking over the spending of small sums of money; his refusal to allow negotiators to sign off on collective bargaining agreements; his disinterest in the nuts and bolts of a labor union and his drifting from one idealistic movement-building scheme to another; his constant threats to resign if he didn't get his way. Buried beneath the surface, however, was the root difficulty: Chavez could not abide the idea, much less the reality, that the farmworkers themselves could and should run the union.

Pawel unearths plenty of evidence of Chavez's disdain, distrust, even dislike of the rank and file for whom he had presumably built his movement. In many unions, talented workers get elected to local union office. From there, they can actively participate in national union affairs and sometimes get elected or appointed to higher union office. This was impossible in the UFW because there were never any local unions. Chavez made all appointments to the staff and tightly controlled those who sat on the UFW board. The union's constitution gave staff persons due process rights, but Chavez always ignored these. Few staffers were former farmworkers; most were Anglos, including the attorneys. I believe that this was intentional. It prevented the formation of power bases that might challenge Chavez. The only Anglo who might have successfully challenged Chavez was Marshall Ganz, and he chose not to do so, at least not openly.

Chavez regularly told farmworker leaders one thing and staff and the board another. In late 1976, with the union on the verge of power in the fields, Medina and others were excited about newly formed ranch committees of workers they hoped would eventually become the centers of the union. Chavez always gave lip service to worker empowerment, but he backed away when push came to shove. At a conference that Medina could not attend, Chavez said, regarding workers: "The newer they are in terms of immigrants, the more money means to them." He argued that they didn't understand sacrifice and would have to be educated before they could assume power.

Pawel tells us that these comments were edited out of the conference minutes, as were these telling words: "You don't want farmworkers managing the union right now. With the attitude they have on money, it would be a total goddam disaster, it would be chaotic. Unless they're taught the other life, it wouldn't work." During the purges in 1977, Chavez said about his members: "Every time we look at them, they want more money. Like pigs, you know. Here we're slaving, and we're starving and the goddam workers don't give a shit about anything because we don't train them, you

know, we don't teach them anything." Or tell them anything either. They knew nothing about The Game or the internal struggles in their union.

Perhaps nothing better illustrates Chavez and his closest allies' disdain toward farmworkers than an event at La Paz in 1979, when volunteers were teaching English to farmworkers. Ironically, the legal staff and the workers were celebrating significant victories in the lettuce strikes. Chavez had been invited to join the festivities, but he stayed at La Paz. Here is how Pawel describes what happened:

> A few days later, a different celebration took place at La Paz. Farmworkers graduated from an English class. . . . The proud students put on a slide show for their families, the La Paz community, and most of the union officers. The slides ended with a familiar refrain, the same message that Eliseo had delivered at a boycott conference in almost the same spot less than eight years earlier: The union is not César Chávez. The union is not La Paz. The union is the workers.
>
> Graduates and guests, board members and union leaders trooped down to the communal kitchen for a celebratory lunch. They had barely sat down when Delores Huerta rose and began to grill the teachers. She demanded to know who had suggested such subversive thoughts. Someone must have put the workers up to voicing such disloyalty, and she wanted a confession. The meal ended before it had begun. Two teachers were fired later that day.
>
> The union is the workers had been their campaign slogan, the essence of the UFW's appeal as the union waged war against the Teamsters and piled up election victories. But that was four years earlier and another era. The union was César Chávez, and to suggest otherwise was treason.

When I read this, I thought that the many groups that have honored Huerta should be ashamed.

Despite myriad problems, the UFW continued to organize, get contracts, win legal victories, and strike. Then, at the end of 1978, events commenced that finally destroyed the union, bringing Chavez's refusal to countenance worker control into the open. Thirty collective bargaining agreements expired, most of them involving lettuce companies, the heart and soul of California agriculture. Union farmworker leaders from various ranches came to La Paz to plot strategy for what promised to be an epic struggle to negotiate new contracts. Ten workers were elected to a negotiating committee, which would bargain with all the companies as a group. Ultimately, a strike vote was called, and a strike fund was authorized.

The great lettuce strike began on January 19, 1979. It spread and stopped production. Chavez sabotaged it every step of the way. He accused Ganz of inciting violence. He dismantled the UFW's legal department. When the strikers began to build power among themselves that could have expanded the strike and achieved stunning victories, Chavez said the strike couldn't be won and that only a boycott could succeed. When—as a direct result of the strike and workers' newly developed power—Jerry Cohen finally won contracts from many of the growers, Chavez sulked at La Paz. The new agreements provided company-paid ranch union representatives, similar to shop stewards in a local union of factory workers. These paid union reps were a credible threat to Chavez's power and, while Chavez again praised the workers poised to run the union, he also plotted to destroy them.

The final fifty pages of the book make for depressing reading. Chavez used every dirty trick in the book to defeat the worker leaders. He slandered them. He sent goons, including his criminal cousin, Manuel Chavez, to threaten and beat them. The union may even have engineered the automobile accident of farmworker leader Cleofas Guzman that left him paralyzed. When it appeared that a worker-dominated slate opposed to him might win seats on the board, Chavez wrote new rules for the union convention. He fired the paid reps who challenged him, including Mario

Bustamante and Sabino Lopez and had them drummed out of the union. His goons picketed places where Sabino and Mario got employment.

A look at the UFW today gives us an accurate picture of the legacy of César Chávez. Before writing her book, Miriam Pawel wrote an exceptional series of articles for the *Los Angeles Times* that exposed the union as not only irrelevant to the lives of farmworkers, a mere handful of them still members, but also as what might charitably be called a quasi-racket. She discusses this in the book, but the *Times* essays give more detail. The union was then run by Cesar's son-in-law, Arturo Rodríquez (now retired), who comes in for rough treatment by Pawel's informants, including Eliseo Medina. Perhaps the word that best describes Rodríquez is incompetent; indeed, he showed none of the abilities of any of the great UFW organizers. He did appear to have a talent for overseeing, along with Cesar's son Paul and other family members and assorted scoundrels, an empire—begun by Chavez himself—of housing developments, radio stations, consulting enterprises, mass-mailing fundraising campaigns, and marketing schemes (UFW paraphernalia, Chavez mementos, and the like). Meanwhile, pension and health funds were awash in cash, but precious few workers got any benefits. In a labor movement notorious for corruption and shortchanging the membership, the United Farm Workers secured a place on the union wall of infamy.

Miriam Pawel does not claim that *The Union of Their Dreams* is a definitive account of the United Farm Workers. We do not get much insight into the formation of Chavez's personality and worldview. We do not learn enough about the history of the farmworker labor movement. Filipino workers played a key role here, and Chavez's complex relationship with them gets little attention, even though it could be argued that he usurped the nascent union they had built. The roles of clergy, community activist and political theorist Saul Alinsky, the AFL-CIO, the left-led unions, anti-communism, and much else gets insufficient attention. I believe that when scholars dig into all of this, they will find that there is more

continuity in Chavez's history and philosophy than previously understood. His conception of building a movement in a modern capitalist society was remarkably flawed.[9]

But, as Pawel herself says, many more books will have to be written before the whole story has been told. Luckily for us, she has shown the way. Hers is the most honest book yet written about the UFW. For anyone interested in this iconic union, this is indispensable reading.

Postscript

It might be easy to think of UFW members as simply Hispanic, given that Spanish was the lingua franca of the union. This would be to miss essential differences within the membership. Chavez's main base of support was among members of Mexican heritage but born in the United States, often referred to as Chicanos and Chicanas. However, many farm laborers were born in Mexico. They often were undocumented, though not always. There is no doubt that Chavez was somewhat distrustful of this group. They were often militant, having had union experiences in Mexico, where left-wing political views were common within the working class. They also might not have been nearly as religious as Cesar and not overly impressed with hunger strikes and his exhortations to make Christ-like sacrifices for the workers. They were keen to control their own lives, and that meant having some power within the union. The earliest union successes were among grape workers, and those were more likely to be Chicanos, Chicanas. The later lettuce campaigns were more likely to be dominated by Mexican workers.

Chavez was hostile to undocumented immigrants, arguing that they were used as strikebreakers, undermining the union. This led to an unsavory relationship with the U.S. Immigration authorities. Fernando Gapasin, an exceptional labor organizer and a nephew of Philip Vera Cruz, a Filipino who helped lead Filipino farmworkers in union efforts years before the UFW existed and was later

purged by Cesar, describes one of his first organizing campaigns, under the banner of the UFW:

> In 1974, I helped organize a strike of Mexican mushroom workers [the employer's name is Steak Mate] in Morgan Hill, a rural town, just south of San Jose. For two months, workers and community supporters walked the picket lines. Without telling us organizers, La Paz (UFW headquarters) called in the Immigration and Naturalization Service, *la migra*, on our strike. César Chávez thought *sin papeles* (undocumented workers) were scabbing. In fact, because of the strong community support, our strike participation was 100 percent—no one crossed our line. Half of our strikers did not have papers. We were alerted about the raid from a local congressman's office. We saved our people from it. The company did bring in African-American workers recruited from Oakland to break the strike. They rolled up with buses equipped with cow catchers. We formed a human barricade and blocked them. The scab contractor, Angie Davis, vowed to return with "hard heads" that would bust us up. With the help of our United Auto Workers (UAW) friends, the next day we mobilized one thousand people from the surrounding working-class communities to stop the scabs. Violence erupted when the buses tried to run us over. We stood firm, with dozens of us going to jail. The *San Jose Mercury* called it the "Battle at Steakmate." Steakmate got an injunction that limited our picket lines, but we continued to picket. The UFW ended the strike after four months, alleging violence and needing organizers for building the Agricultural Labor Relations Board and lobbying work in Sacramento. Our strike became a boycott of Purina products. The memory of the courage of the workers and community supporters standing together was branded into the souls of workers in Morgan Hill and, two years later, they organized again; this time they won. I learned that when a community cares about workers, they can win.[10]

One of the most shameful aspects of UFW history was the intimidation campaign waged in the mid-1970s by the union against undocumented immigrants along the U.S.-Mexican border. It was called the "wet line."[11] Not only did UFW field offices turn in several thousand undocumented entrants into the United States to immigration authorities, but the union also engaged in vigilante actions along the border. Historian and former farmworker Frank Bardacke says,

> Men wearing armbands saying "UFW Border Patrol" hunted illegals. For about three months, from late September to early 1975, anywhere from 35 to 300 people were employed on what the union called the "wet line." They lived in a string of twelve to seventeen large army surplus tents, set up within fifty yards of the border in a line stretching east of the small town of San Luis, Arizona. They were paid $10 a day plus expenses. They operated mostly at night, using dune buggies, cars, vans, and small trucks to chase people down. During the day, they also had a small plane to track people from the air.[12]

It is difficult to know how much violence was directed at the "illegals," but some certainly was. Chavez justified the wet line by saying that the illegals were scabs or taking the jobs of legal immigrants and U.S. citizens. But the truth is that he harbored ill will toward immigrants from Mexico. By this time, Mexicans made up a significant faction of all farmworkers in the West and a growing faction of union members. They were a threat to Chavez's power, and therefore their potential for future strength in the union had to be weakened.

We see from the UFW that building a union that pushes the class struggle forward in ways that challenge the power of capital is a difficult and problematic endeavor. If radical democracy is not central to the union's primary principles and structure, then capital will reassert its domination sooner or later.

8

A Working-Class Revolt? Pandemic, Depression, and Protest in the United States

Karl Marx said, "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."[1] Yes, but how do we do this? Radicals believe that the working class, broadly conceived, must be the agent of change. If we agree that the rule of capital must end, given that it is the labor of an ever-expanding working class that is central to its power, then what other entity could destroy its dominion? And if capitalism is the apotheosis of class society, then no future class societies are possible. Therefore, if the working class does destroy the rule of capital, it will either restore it at some point or move in a radically democratic and substantively egalitarian direction.

If we look at matters globally, peasants, who still comprise an enormous share of the world's population, must be added to the working class.[2] However, the question of "how" remains. It was thought by many in the Marxist tradition that it would be in the advanced capitalist countries that radical transformation would begin because this is where the system's contradictions were sharpest and easiest to exploit and where the consciousness of

workers was highest. This proved not to be the case. Yet, this has not stopped leftists in the Global North from continuing the struggle for socialism on their home grounds.

Much has been made of the remarkable rise of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in the United States. For many, they are now the voice of the left. Their social democratic politics are not much different from those in Europe. I described DSA's worldview this way:

> There is no chance for a radically new system of production and distribution in the short term, and certainly not through a revolutionary upheaval. Only a long-term peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism is possible. Such an evolution is to be achieved through electoral politics. Given the stranglehold of the two-party system in the United States, those who hope for socialism must work within the more liberal of these, the Democratic Party, actively supporting and ultimately getting elected to Congress and the presidency what certain DSA luminaries call "class-struggle social democrats." These stalwarts of radical transformation will, when their numbers are sufficient, have a strong popular mandate to use the state to gradually dismantle the power of the wealthy and the corporations they control and replace them with worker- and community-owned cooperatives. Meanwhile, the government will enact legislation, financed by sharply progressive taxes on both income and wealth combined with central bank injections into the public treasury of newly printed money, that provides a safety net for every citizen against the many slings and arrows of modern life. Medicare for All, free public college schooling, massive livable public housing, an ambitious carbon-reducing and public-employment-generating Green New Deal, job retraining, and greatly expanded and cheap public

> transportation will make us happier, more productive, and freer to pursue our interests.
>
> As the success of social democracy become apparent and part of our normal expectations, it will become possible to slowly move toward full socialism, with the withering away of both private ownership of the means of production and the state itself. I haven't seen any details on this, but one could imagine that the hierarchical structure of workplaces will gradually give way to a much more horizontal structure of power. Internationally, similar social democracies will together engage in mutually beneficial trade, with global governance agencies that peacefully solve problems in what will continue to be a globally interdependent world.[3]

The DSA's political position strikes me as pathetically utopian. One outcome of this worldview is the ceaseless pursuit of "hopeful signs" of impending radical change. Every election of a self-described democratic socialist, every strike, every organizing campaign, every protest in the streets becomes a harbinger of a deeper understanding of capitalism and a greater willingness to push society to the left.

Most recently, employers have been forced to raise wages due to a perceived labor shortage. It certainly is remarkable that the pandemic has led many workers to reexamine what they do for a living and decide to make changes. Articles in the media have highlighted workers in various occupations quitting their jobs. During April, May, and June 2021, 11.5 million people quit their jobs. Another 8,4 million quit in July and August. High quit rates continued through the rest of 2021. These are unprecedented numbers: "A survey of over 30,000 workers conducted by Microsoft found that 41 percent are considering quitting; that number jumps to 54 percent when Gen-Z is considered alone. Gallup found that 48 percent of employees are

actively searching for new opportunities. The business website Inc. reported that 38 percent of those they surveyed planned to make a change in the next six months."[4] In fall 2021, several large strikes were taking place, and others were pending.[5] What to make of this is unclear, but the social democrats will be quick to draw unwarranted conclusions.

The following essay offers both a clearer and more radical perspective within which to view such developments.[6]

In 2018 and 2019, leftist writers, organizers, and pundits were exclaiming that U.S. workers were on the move, striking even in the "red" states that had voted for Donald Trump. Claims were made that the presidential campaigns for Bernie Sanders and the rapid growth of the DSA were primarily responsible for this rise in militancy by long-suffering laborers, who had seen their economic circumstances deteriorate for decades. Left-wing journalists interviewed striking teachers and automobile workers, reporting on a new mood of combativeness. After years of slumber, perhaps the working class was awakening.[7]

Besides the anecdotal evidence, the optimists pointed to an increase in major strikes. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) defines a major strike as involving at least one thousand workers. In 2017, there were only seven of these, the second-lowest number since records were first kept in 1947.[8] In 2018, however, there were twenty, with a hefty 2,815,400 lost "person days" of labor resulting (this measure combines the number of strikers and the duration of the strike). There were major strikes by public school teachers, healthcare providers, and social assistance workers, such as those providing childcare and home health aid. Teachers struck in states where there was no enabling collective bargaining legislation that compels employers to bargain in good faith over wages, hours, and terms and conditions of employment. In addition, many of the strikers were not union members. More remarkable was that these were statewide strikes in unexpected places: Arizona, Oklahoma,

West Virginia, Kentucky, and North Carolina. These walkouts won state-mandated improvements in wages and conditions.

The trend in labor strife continued in 2019, with twenty-five major stoppages and 3,224,300 lost person days of work. Two strikes stood out: one by Chicago public school teachers and support staff and another by auto workers at General Motors. In the first, 25,000 teachers and 7,500 support staff, represented by the Chicago Teachers Union and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), walked off the job on October 17 and stayed out for fourteen days. They won better wages, benefits, and conditions, and the Chicago Teachers Union laid the groundwork for future community outreach programs such as living quarters for homeless students. The second strike involved 49,000 General Motors employees and lasted nearly six weeks. The resulting contract increased wages, included promises by the company to invest more capital in the United States, and partially abated the many-tiered wage structure in which workers with similar experience earn vastly different wages and benefits.

What about 2020? We do not know if this trend would have continued to pick up steam had the nation not been struck by a global pandemic. As of late July 2020, about 150,000 people had died in the United States (by the end of 2021, it was more than 800,000). The economy had experienced a never-before-seen collapse of employment and production. Some 50 million previously employed persons filed for unemployment compensation over three months.[9] Given how restrictive the compensation system has become, with smaller and smaller fractions of the unemployed able to qualify for benefits, the actual amount of labor market insecurity was greater than even these incredible numbers suggest. In April, the official BLS unemployment rate was 14.7 percent, but because of a classification error, 7.5 million were not counted as unemployed.[10] Had they been counted, the rate would have been 19.3 percent. And if we include those involuntarily working part-time and those who have simply stopped looking for work, the extent of labor market insecurity was more than 25 percent. The

rate fell slightly in May and June 2020, but the actual amount of labor market insecurity was still over 20 percent.

Yet, if tens of millions were unemployed, most in the labor force were working. The U.S. labor force contained nearly 160 million people. Over the three months of April, May, and June 2020, more than 130 million were employed each month. It is not easy for the unemployed to organize, although they participated in rent strikes, fought to secure public funds, and took to the streets against police violence. But what about the still working? Those working faced not only long hours and, for the most part, inadequate pay but also dire health risks. Whether in healthcare, farm fields and labor camps, food delivery, grocery stores, food banks, FedEx and UPS trucks, post offices and postal delivery vehicles, buses, subways, trains, airplanes, boats, warehouses, or construction sites, those who labor risked their lives to work, with many becoming sick and dying.[11]

It should be stressed that concerning unemployment, employment, and the pandemic proper, Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), and women suffered disproportionately. Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people have died from COVID-19 at much higher rates than whites. More than 40 percent of frontline workers are BIPOC. As in every month, the unemployment rates for Black and Latinx workers have been higher than for whites during the pandemic. Some have called the economic depression a "shecession" because women have been its primary victims.[12]

Despite or maybe because of what they were facing, workers protested and struck. There were strikes and threatened strikes at Amazon warehouses, a Barnes and Noble warehouse, Whole Foods, automobile plants, food delivery services like Instacart, transit companies, restaurants, sanitation companies, farms, and food processing plants. The website Payday Report tracked more than eight hundred wildcat strikes between March and early July 2020. The strikes varied in size, demands, and duration—though most were short. Apple shed laborers, who sort and pack fruit in Washington's Yakima Valley, struck in early and mid-May to

compel their employer to provide them with safe working conditions and $2 an hour extra in hazard pay.[13] Strikes took place at meatpacking plants across the country. Sanitation workers in southern Louisiana, who pick up trash in New Orleans, walked out in early May, demanding a living wage of $25 an hour, hazard pay, and protective equipment.[14]

Similarly courageous demands were made by striking workers in Pittsburgh in mid-March. *The Guardian* reported that "fast-food workers with the Fight for $15 and a union campaign have organized one-day strikes and protests in California, Illinois, Florida, Missouri and Tennessee through the pandemic." Clothing plant workers making protective face masks in Selma, Alabama, struck on April 23 after two co-workers tested positive for COVID-19.[15]

Besides strikes, there were also pressure campaigns, ongoing public efforts, and pickets mounted by diverse workers. The Chicago Teachers Union and a teachers' union caucus in New York City—the Movement of Rank-and-File Educators—pressured mayors to close schools, ultimately helping force public officials to act after delays that ultimately led to sickness and death. Nurses and their unions picketed as did sanitation and transportation employees. They demanded social distancing measures and personal protective equipment. Medical workers went public, risking employer censure, noting the many health hazards they face that management had not adequately addressed. On May Day 2020, graduate student workers across the country launched a campaign to pressure universities to protect them during the pandemic by providing them with better pay, rent subsidies, a free year of tuition, and some guarantee of future employment.[16] Truck drivers in several states organized convoys protesting sharp drops in mileage rates.[17]

Where a good local union exists, employers can be forced to protect workers, as has sometimes happened during the COVID-19 crisis. Two food processing plants located close to one another illustrate this in Washington state. One, a French fry potato processor in Pasco, is a Teamsters plant.

> Even before any workers at the union-represented Lamb Weston french fry plant in Pasco, Wash., were diagnosed with COVID-19, the Teamsters union representing more than 550 workers at the plant insisted that management take steps to protect workers from the deadly virus. When a worker at the plant was eventually diagnosed with COVID-19 in late March, the plant was immediately closed and the workers were sent home—with pay—for two weeks as the plant was disinfected. After that, additional measures were taken by management and the union to protect workers.

The nonunion plant fifteen miles away, a Tyson beef-processing facility, could not have been more different.

> The Tyson plant has become Washington state's biggest hotspot for the COVID-19 outbreak. The *Tri-City Herald* reported Wednesday that there are 101 confirmed cases linked to the plant. Tragically, one of the infected employees, 60-year-old J. Guadalupe Olivera Mendoza, has died. But as of this writing, unlike other meat-processing plants that have been shut down across the country, the Tyson plant in Wallula remains open for business and reportedly continues to operate near full capacity.[18]

Three members of the Electrical Workers union, one of the few radical labor organizations in the United States, spoke to the need to educate and help workers during this unprecedented crisis:

> Our union, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), has called on all workers, both our members and nonunion workers, to stand up and fight. We have created online resources to help nonunion workers take action to win safe workplaces. We have published a special issue of UE Steward on how to organize members around COVID-19 issues in the workplace. Alongside the Democratic Socialists of America we are launching a joint effort called the Emergency Workplace Organizing

Committee, which will provide organizing and logistical support to workers who are ready to take on their boss. Our members, both in organized shops and in workplaces where we have organizing campaigns, are winning concessions from their employers through militant and creative tactics.[19]

A Long Way to Go

Although the above offers us considerable hope about the U.S. labor movement, it must be understood that the wave of strikes and other labor actions represent progress only because they arose from a very low base. According to the BLS, union density (the percentage of wage and salary workers in labor unions) in the United States in 2019 was 10.3 percent, or about 14.6 million workers. In 2018, the BLS estimated that union density was 10.5 percent, with about the same number of workers. In 2017, the year before the much-vaunted rise in labor militancy, it was slightly higher than in either succeeding year.

The methodology now used by the BLS allows comparisons back to 1983. In that year, union density was 20.1 percent, with three million more members than today. Though density estimates before this are not directly comparable, the consensus estimate for 1955, the year the AFL and CIO merged, was more than 30 percent.

If we look at the breakdown in densities by private versus public sector workers, we see that density in the private sector in 2019 was 6.2 percent, lower than the 6.4 percent for 2018. Both numbers are almost certainly less than a comparable number one hundred years ago. Given that in 1955 almost all union members were in the private sector, these numbers represent a decline in density of at least 24 percentage points. That translates into a decline of 79 percent! What has prevented union density from falling still more steeply has been the relatively high fraction of union members in city, state, and federal government employment—33 percent in 2019, a bit lower than it was in 2018, when it was 33.9 percent.

The union density figures would seem to indicate a weak labor movement, especially in private employment. However, this is not necessarily the case. In France, a small percentage of the workforce is unionized. Yet, French workers historically have been militant, willing to engage in mass strikes and protests whenever their interests have been threatened by employers or the government. The yellow vests (*gilets jaunes*) movement in France, which lasted for over a year, gives another example, one not even directly connected to the labor movement. However, nothing like this can be said of the United States, at least not yet.

We have already looked at major strikes for 2017, 2018, and 2019. If we take a long-term view, what happened in 2018 and 2019, though heartening, pales compared to what has taken place in the past. For example, between 1990 and 2001, the average number of major strikes was thirty-five, with a high of forty-five in 1994 and a low of seventeen in 1999. In terms of workdays lost to major strikes, in only one of these twelve years was the number lower than in either 2018 or 2019. If we go further back in time, we see just how small the current numbers are. Between 1947 and 1982, the number of major strikes was never lower than 145, with a high of 470 in 1952. For days lost, the number was never lower than 16,908,400, with a high of 60,850,000 in 1959. The percentage that these numbers represent of all workdays hit a high of 43 percent in 1950. And at no time was this percent less than seven times what it was in 2018 and 2019. Even considering the many wildcat strikes since the pandemic began, these pale in comparison to the similar strikes in the 1970s when rank-and-file workers revolted against their employers and sometimes against their unions. In just two years, 1974 and 1975, there were nine thousand strikes, almost all wildcats, in the nation's coalfields.[20]

Several factors provide context for the recent uptick in labor struggles. First, many U.S. unions never abandoned their disastrous embrace of labor-management cooperation, throwing solidarity and, for some, their own histories out the window. Instead, they partnered with management to raise productivity

in a race to help companies, even individual plants, make more money. Second, corruption is rife in the labor movement. There is the soft corruption of obscenely high salaries and perks for top officers. There is the harder corruption of disdain for the rank and file and the violent efforts to suppress the rise of new leaders and rank-and-file movements to make their unions democratic. And there is the blatant corruption of theft and extortion. I once had a student in a class that was part of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst's Union Leadership Academy, who worked for the SEIU. He was found guilty of stealing tens of thousands of dollars from a local union of poorly paid workers and sent to prison. When he was released, an SEIU local hired him to be their lead organizer! Right now (in 2020), the once-iconic United Auto Workers union (UAW) is awash in corruption at the highest level, with former national presidents either indicted or facing indictment. Several officials have already been sentenced to prison.[21] Third, the labor movement has never fully addressed the systemic racism and patriarchy of its organizations. Given the changing demography of the country and the BIPOC- and women-led rebellions, this does not offer much hope for the future of the labor movement as it is presently constituted.[22]

Finally, there is a more subtle matter, but of utmost importance. Today's big unions, some of which waged heroic struggles in the past to the benefit of millions of workers and their families (mine among them), have no interest in workers' control of production, aimed at producing use values. They have a great deal of money and property that could be put to good use along these lines. Unions in the past have built working-class housing developments, hospitals (the famous miners' hospitals, for example), vacation resorts for members, even schools for workers. Why not do this now with farms, processing plants, grocery stores, clean vehicles for public transit, high-quality and inexpensive housing, and much more? It seems that unions (the UAW, for example), other than being regularly mired in corruption, are as dedicated to the reproduction of wage labor as are the unions of cops and prison guards to

the reproduction of a criminal class. How could those who direct labor organizations have just stood by while a Trump appointee dismissed workers as "human capital" and claimed that they were dying to get back to work? Well, what kind of work? Work that is mostly unfit for human beings? Or work that we direct ourselves, producing for society and not for the wealthy?

The actions of teachers and others who struck in 2018 and 2019 are indeed commendable. But a close look at the UAW contract agreement that ended the General Motors strike shows that it still left much to be desired.[23] Organized teachers who struck made substantial gains, but the unorganized teachers who struck and did achieve some victories have no way to bind state governments without unionization and collective bargaining agreements. And, with the pandemic, states have closed schools, and their budgets have been stretched. How likely is it that these teachers will be able to consolidate what they have won?

Unions, Trump, and COVID-19

A union means greater safety for workers with respect to the virus. And, as we have noted, the UE has been providing its members with useful information and active support for locals facing recalcitrant employers. The union also has offered such aid to all workers through their website. In contrast, the carpenters' union, whose members are still working on construction sites, has done little to protect them. In fact, its West Coast magazine, sent to all member carpenters in this region, did not have a single article on COVID-19 in a recent issue.[24] This union, along with others in construction, cozied up to Donald Trump, whose administration could hardly have been more anti-labor, with those extraordinarily hostile to the working class holding cabinet and top administration agency posts. As an essay by the Center for American Progress explained, Trump and company denied overtime pay to more than eight million employees, undermined wage theft enforcement, gave billions in federal contracts to corporations that

violate wage laws, undermined and understaffed the Department of Labor, denied workers access to the courts, made it more difficult for workers to unionize and easier for employers to get rid of them, imposed trade agreements that hurt workers, threatened worker retirement savings, revoked employee civil rights protections, sought to allow employers to discriminate against gay and transgender workers, helped block persons with disabilities from working, sanctioned worker exposure to dangerous chemicals and hazardous conditions, and weakened Occupational Safety and Health Administration enforcement.[25] Before becoming president, Trump worked closely with mobbed-up New York City unions, especially in the construction industry.

Yet, despite Trump's history, a significant number of union members voted for him. As I put it not long after Trump was elected:

> According to the local union president, 30 to 40 percent of the 600 workers at the Momentive chemical plant in Waterford, NY, recently engaged in a bitter strike and, represented by the progressive and fiercely anti-Trump Communication Workers of America, chose Trump. Nationwide, according to an AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] exit poll, 37 percent of union members voted for Trump. . . .
>
> One would think that with such an anti-worker president, the U.S. labor movement would be primed to do all in its power to mobilize union members to resist, much as millions of people have protested Trump since the day he took office. But such has not been the case. The leaders of the country's building trades unions met with Trump in the White House. These worthies were lavish in their praise for him, presumably keen on the possibility of new construction employment rebuilding the nation's infrastructure, the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the wall along the border with Mexico. Perhaps they saw Trump as a kindred spirit, given that like them, he has had no qualms about being in bed with mobsters nor with organizations with long histories

> of racism and sexism. They practice a "me first, last, and always" business unionism just as Trump practices a similar kind of business. Solidarity is not in their vocabularies.
>
> More troubling still was the meeting AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka had with Trump in New York City a week before his inauguration. Afterward, Trumka said that he and Trump had "a very honest and productive conversation." This after the union chief had sharply and vigorously condemned Trump for his anti-unionism and much else. How is it that as millions were protesting a man very likely to be the worst president since James Buchanan, the country's top union official was meeting with him? Shouldn't he have been leading the protests? Trumka stooped even lower when more recently he lavished praise on Trump for the president's first address before Congress.[26]

Then, as the federal government failed beyond measure to confront a deadly pandemic, as Trump committed acts of omission that killed people every day, as he forced meatpacking workers back to the killing floor (literally), as he showed blatant contempt for the working class, AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka became a member of "the White House's Great American Economic Revival Industry Groups, which were announced Tuesday as part of the president's efforts to 'open' back up parts of the U.S. economy." But not to worry, he voiced various concerns about the needs of workers, as Trump supposedly listened intently, with industry leaders and Trumka all on the same page. This was the supposed leader of organized labor (Trumka died in August 2021).[27]

The Black Lives Matter Uprisings and Organized Labor

Coming on top of the pandemic and economic breakdown was the brutal racist murder of George Floyd, a Black man, at the hands of Minneapolis police on May 25, 2020. Massive protests erupted throughout the United States. The AFL-CIO and many national unions issued statements in support of the rebellions

and in opposition to systemic racism. No doubt, plenty of union members participated in the uprising. Union transit workers in Minneapolis and New York City, in a show of direct solidarity, refused to transport those arrested to police stations in their buses. The Minnesota AFL-CIO called for the resignation of Minneapolis police union president Bob Kroll, a notorious white supremacist. Several local unions actively took part in protests; the teachers' union successfully urged that the school district end its contract with the city police; and another local urged its Black members to take bereavement leave, leading the employer to allow all members to take sixteen hours of such leave.[28] Over the course of the first months of this uprising, numerous quick strikes took place. On Juneteenth, *Payday Report* noted that longshoremen would go on strike at twenty-nine ports across the West Coast. The UAW planned to stop production on all assembly lines for eight minutes and forty-six seconds to honor George Floyd:

> The strikes come as workers have walked off the job at over 500 employers in the last 3 weeks alone. The Washington State General Strike saw workers go on wildcat strikes at over 250 locations across the state according to our Strike Tracking Map. The #ShutDownStem strikes last week also saw scientists go on strike at 109 locations across the U.S.
>
> If the size of these strikes last week is any indication, Juneteenth will likely be the largest day of strikes in more than a generation.[29]

Before this stoppage, Gulf and East Coast dockworkers closed ports in honor of George Floyd's funeral. "'All operations stopped, the terminals were shut down, no machines were working, trucks were backed up for miles along the interstate because we weren't moving anything on the terminal,' said Ken Riley, a Black dockworker and President of ILA Local 1422."[30]

But how deep was labor's embrace of the protests against systemic racism and police violence? Despite the support for the

uprisings from unions and their members, the AFL-CIO and national union leaders have been hesitant to condemn police unions. A good argument can be made that police should not be permitted membership in labor unions. Their role historically has always been to support business owners and private property in general. They have been repeatedly employed to break strikes, jail picketers and strikers, and they have used violence as a standard suppression technique. Examples abound: the Great Upheaval of 1877, the Haymarket Massacre of 1886, the Homestead strike of 1892, the Pullman strike in 1894, the Memorial Day Massacre of 1937, and thousands of other labor disputes, large and small.[31]

Yet, both the AFL-CIO itself and national unions have chartered police union locals. What is more, police unions routinely negotiate collective bargaining agreements that make it nearly impossible to severely discipline cops who maim or kill working people, especially Black people and people of color. Town and city government officials are typically in league with the police unions, receiving large donations from them and usually serving the same rich constituents. The Center for Public Integrity sought comments from top union leaders concerning police violence and police unions. Its reporter wrote:

> None were willing to talk about police unions. Trumka, of the AFL-CIO, was too busy to chat. The president of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union couldn't fit a call into his schedule. Teamsters President James Hoffa declined to comment.
>
> Silence from the Service Employees International Union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, United Auto Workers, Communication Workers of America, Unite Here and the American Federation of Teachers.
>
> Labor leaders briefly talked about police unions in response to a reporter's question Wednesday. They seemed uncomfortable.
>
> Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said no union contracts should shield employee

misconduct, but that focusing on collective bargaining is a "false choice."

In the wake of the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Trumka made this remarkable statement: "Lesley McSpadden, Michael Brown's mother who works in a grocery store, is our sister, an AFL-CIO union member, and Darren Wilson, the officer who killed Michael Brown, is a union member, too, and he is our brother."[32]

The AFL-CIO did little to embrace, much less lead, the numerous wildcat walkouts spurred by the death of George Floyd and rampant police violence against people of color. It should be noted that during the protests in Washington, DC, AFL-CIO headquarters were torched and vandalized by Black Lives Matter protesters, perhaps because the labor federation refused to distance itself from police unions.[33]

The Triple Crisis Has Made Society's Fault Lines Transparent

I am not the first person to say that a crisis reveals the fault lines in a society. This triple crisis is unprecedented. COVID-19 is wreaking havoc on our health and killing us in large numbers, bringing with it the most massive and steep economic collapse in U.S. history. Then, there was the murder of George Floyd and the resulting global protests. Anyone can see that capitalism, facing no real opposition in decades, has reverted to its default position: only profit rules us, and those with money will beat down those with none, without mercy or remorse.

The results have been predictable:

1. Steadily and now sharply rising inequality in every facet of life: income; wealth; healthcare; education; moderately comfortable retirement; working conditions; education; housing; access to public amenities like parks, playgrounds, culture;

police and fire protection; legal assistance; clean water and air; hope itself—all are obscenely maldistributed. Those at the top have much, those at the bottom little, and those in the middle are sinking.

2. The privatization of everything, with almost every goods- or service-providing entity run on a strict profit-making basis. We need but do not get good healthcare, good education, and most other necessities unless we can pay. The vaunted capitalist economy cannot feed its people, but it can feed the stock market.
3. Most jobs are not worth doing. And those that are necessary are all too often poorly paid and fraught with danger. Both kinds of work occur in ultra-hierarchical settings where employers deploy constant speedup and the most sophisticated surveillance techniques, not just at work but with big data collection that predicts employee behavior.
4. Racism and patriarchy are inherent to capitalism. Untrammeled violence against Black people, people of color, and women continue unabated, and the neofascist Trump administration normalized this to an extent not seen in a long time.[34]

The three crises have made these outcomes clearer than ever before. It is not difficult to imagine that, with COVID-19, mass unemployment, and a widespread social uprising that engulfed the country, millions of people are now witnessing the disintegration of the "normal." We have watched hospitals fill up while doctors, nurses, and other health workers lack the most basic equipment. Emergency room waiting lines have spilled out onto the streets. Beds have been in short supply. And we have learned that hospitals operate on the same just-in-time inventory practice as automobile companies, except that now this practice means death. The horror of life in nursing homes could not be more obvious, as the virus has ripped through them, killing residents by the thousands, deaths that were in no way inevitable. If it is not now evident that the U.S. healthcare system is broken and in need of

a radical overhaul, it never will be. And if COVID-19 testing has been made free of charge, why should treatment itself not be free? In fact, why should we pay for any medical, dental, and eye care? Shouldn't these be paid for through general and progressive taxation? Wasn't healthcare meant to be an inalienable human right? Shouldn't it be able to meet our basic human needs?

With respect to the economic debacle and the government's response, is it not apparent that nearly all workers are subject to immediate discharge, that nearly everyone's situation is precarious, that dangerous insecurity can raise its ugly head in a heartbeat? Can't we now see that no production can occur without workers, and no profits can be made? Didn't Trump's order that meatpacking plants be reopened, knowing full well that workers would get sick and some would die, as they already had, tell us just what is important? Who cannot now know that those who care for us and make life possible, mainly women and people of color, are the poorest paid—or not paid at all in the case of household labor—and least appreciated? While those whose positions are best remunerated and most secure, and who have typically been able to work from home during the pandemic, are always given special consideration and heaped with praise? What does it mean that the Trump administration, as well as top corporate and even university officials, wanted kids back in school so that money could be made, illness and death be damned? Why should we sacrifice our health and lives to keep the economy going?

The revolt against police violence and systemic racism finally opened more white eyes than usual to what Black people in particular and BIPOC in general have always known. Poverty, disease, and death stalk their communities, and this has nothing to do with their "lifestyles" but with a sordid history of exclusion. What is more, the rebellion is intimately tied to the pandemic and the economic breakdown—the kind of connection that would usually be hidden but is now out in the open, the subject of mainstream newscasts and media reports. Inequality is connected to the economic downturn and the pandemic itself: women have been hit

harder than men; whites have suffered less than people of color; the poorer the workers, the less likely they can work from home; the least healthy jobs are done by Black and Latinx workers; many employees have collected more money through unemployment compensation and the temporary $600 per week federal supplement than they were paid for working; the pandemic has had grossly uneven impacts, varying directly according to income and wealth, type of employment, skin color, housing quality, with each of these further correlated with the likelihood of underlying conditions. The protests were direct outcomes of systemic racism, which is itself a product of the economic and political history of the United States. No doubt, too, that the duration and breadth of the rebellion were heightened by the pandemic and the dire state of the economy.

Will the U.S. Labor Movement Respond?

Will the U.S. labor movement transform itself and confront these fault lines and help build a new society? Those now laboring might continue to confront their bosses. They may find creative ways to communicate with one another, sharing information and tactics. When the pandemic weakens sufficiently or when more people are compelled to return to work, workers may see their employers in a new light. Those not now working might make demands on employers as a condition of returning to work, especially those whose wages have been kept intact by employers bailed out by the government. Those whose unemployment compensation and supplemental federally funded income have kept them afloat might resist returning to the same old work routine for a pay cut. Some workers may even see that their bosses are not really needed and that their workplaces could be organized in entirely different ways.

Workers may now realize that landlords, banks, and bill collectors do nothing deserving of repayment. Those at the bottom may say to those at the top, "I want a good life too, and I will take what you have to get one." Those who have been most severely exploited

and considered least human might say, "No more, ever." They and their allies might conclude that the police as we know them, along with the prison system, must be abolished and that racism and patriarchy must be attacked directly, forcefully, and constantly.

The abject failure of the healthcare system, the political economy, really every major institution once taken for granted as one that could help us through hard times may force people to conclude that just about everything must be reorganized, made to serve the social interest. Access to doctors, dentists, optometrists, hospitals, and medications should all be matters of basic need, available without charge and paid for out of the public treasury, itself financed by sharply progressive taxes on income and wealth. The same may go for housing and schooling at all levels. Employment might be seen as a vital human interest as well, with public works projects the rule and not the exception, with no more privatization of essential public services. Where possible, socially necessary production, from trash collection to schooling, may come to be seen as necessitating, like public safety, control by communities or by a combination of worker and community governance.

As it becomes a matter of common knowledge that coronaviruses are a consequence of rapid environmental collapse caused directly by the lust for profits endemic to the capitalist mode of production, perhaps more will see the need for decent employment as an imperative to reduce unnecessary production, consumption, and to radically redistribute what is necessary. And to realize that, regarding necessary goods and services, food is most critical. We cannot continue to employ industrial agriculture to feed us. Instead, as has already begun in earnest, local, organic food production, controlled democratically, must replace the current food regime. Surely, the pandemic has shown that there will be future disruptions and shortages in what is most needed: food, water, clean air, healthy soil.

Should all these maybes become realities, will the U.S. labor movement, as it currently exists, do the right thing, both cham-

pioning and leading the various movements now building on the ground? The answer is undoubtedly no. What we need is radical change, and the AFL-CIO and all but a few unions are the enemies of such change. Capitalism is a hegemonic system, and it brings forth the people and institutions it needs. Unions are no exception. Prolific writer, scholar, and political activist Mike Davis signals that a sense of rage is boiling over. For this rage to take a leftist and profoundly radical direction, masses of people will have to force the issue. New organizations must be built. Old ones can become part of them, but their structures need to be fundamentally altered, and they must be subordinate to that which is new.

What does this mean concretely? Historically, workers have engaged in direct mass actions, formed labor unions, and built working-class political parties. These will remain the necessary forms of struggle. Let us look at each in turn.

The earliest labor rebellions were direct actions. After unsuccessfully petitioning Parliament, the Luddites formed an underground army and began to destroy workshops and machinery. In urban areas where capitalism had gained a foothold, workers rioted against employers and the wealthy, again to force a redress of their grievances. When traditional bread prices were no longer honored, bakeries were ransacked, and bread was simply taken. Many direct actions have been taken by workers and peasants, from blockading highways to land confiscations. The global uprising after the police murder of Floyd was likewise immediate and confrontational, with some destruction of business property, stopping interstate highway traffic, burning police precincts, and the like.

Direct action is often characterized, even on the left, as wanton rioting, without rhyme or reason. This is never the case. There are always leaders and at least some planning, especially once the fuse of rebellion has been lit. In Brazil, the Landless Workers' Movement has as its motto, "Occupy, Resist, Produce." Occupy unutilized land, typically stolen from peasants and the poor in the first place. Then resist with force, if necessary, attempts by the powerful to take the land back. Then, begin to produce on

the land, distributing the product among the direct laborers and the community in an egalitarian manner. Cooperation Jackson has implemented a similar strategy in Jackson, Mississippi. The Black Panther Party provides a comparable model. In the late 1960s and during the '70s, they initiated a remarkable number of community-based programs, providing services that poor people could not get in the marketplace, including "the Free Breakfast for Children Program, liberation schools, free health clinics, the Free Food Distribution Program, the Free Clothing Program, child development centers, the Free Shoe Program, the Free Busing to Prison Program, the Sickle Cell Anemia Research Foundation, free housing cooperatives, the Free Pest Control Program, the Free Plumbing and Maintenance Program, renter's assistance, legal aid, the Seniors Escorts Program, and the Free Ambulance Program."[35] Out of such efforts, people learn to care for themselves and one another, gaining confidence that the system does its best to undermine. Nothing could be more important in an era of the dismantling of public services critical to life and the growing privatization of what had been either common or peasant land.

A labor movement must embrace such direct confrontations with capital and be an integral part of them. However, additional structures are necessary. Labor unions must be constructed anew, with forms that fit the modern world. Organizations that are radically democratic, created from the ground up, will be essential. For traditional unions, representing a particular category of workers, an excellent model is the Building Laborers Federation in Australia. Led by Jack Mundey and a group of radicals, a union of mainly poor immigrant workers, dominated by gangsters and corrupt officials, was transformed from the bottom up into a militant, class-conscious union concerned with more than workplace issues. During the 1970s, the union employed mass flying pickets to shut down building sites, thwarting the boom in urban high-rise construction. These strikes allowed the workers to make enormous gains in pay, benefits, training, and dignity.

At the same time, the Building Laborers Federation "experi-

mented with the ideas of workers' control, occupying construction sites, electing their own foremen, staging sit-ins and 'working in' in response to lockouts, poor safety conditions and sackings." These tactics were used to bring women and Aboriginal people into the union and onto the jobs. The union used bilingual organizers and had its literature and meeting proceedings translated into the languages of its European immigrant members. It brought to the membership the idea of "green bans" on ugly and environmentally destructive building projects, winning approval for refusal to work on such sites. Mass meetings and democratic assent were required for all union actions. Remarkably, given the time (1973), the union also implemented the "pink ban," refusing to do construction work at a university that had expelled a gay student.[36]

A few U.S. unions are worth emulating, such as the Chicago Teachers Union, the United Electrical Workers, and the National Union of Healthcare Workers. These unions have strong principles, are embedded in communities, have larger than workplace concerns, and are willing to use direct means to challenge employer power. The old United Packinghouse Workers, led by radicals, not only forced employers to equalize Black and white wages and conditions, but its members also compelled local businesses and landlords to integrate their premises. A network of shop stewards across all the plants and firms the union had organized coordinated wildcat strikes and direct confrontations with the bosses whenever serious grievances arose, even where there were contractual limitations on strikes.[37]

Traditional unions may not be ideal for many workers. For them, geographically centered unions might be better suited to their needs. For example, there are worker centers located throughout the United States. The Chinese Staff and Workers Association in New York City deals mainly with restaurant and garment shop laborers in the city. It takes up their wage and long hours grievances, filing lawsuits and labor law violation suits against employers. It demands that workers actively participate in their disputes and that they, in turn, come to the aid of others who are similarly aggrieved. In this

way, the organization builds a sense of solidarity and community among its members.[38]

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida is another worker center, struggling, often successfully, to improve the working and living conditions of its largely immigrant farm laborers. It has engineered national boycotts against major fast-food chains, to force them to sign an agreement through which they pay growers more for tomatoes and guarantee that the workers get some of the extra farm revenue. It has also fought against human trafficking and assaults against women workers. Again, as with the unions discussed above, these centers are deeply embedded in communities with concerns they share and address.[39] Another possibility is the workers assembly, which has multiple working-class organizations, including labor unions, and in which regular mass meetings are called so that issues pertaining to the class struggle can be dealt with democratically, and strategies and tactics can be developed and implemented.[40]

The third type of working-class entity is the political party. Through these, the working class tries to exert power at the nation-state level and, in some cases, across national borders. Most such parties today are social democratic, and they attempt to win some control over the state and what it does through elections. They originally aimed at control of the state as part of a transition from capitalism to socialism. In some cases, revolutionary struggle seized state power, as in Russia, China, Vietnam, and Cuba. Now, however, most labor parties are reformist, aimed at bettering the conditions of workers through universal programs such as government-sponsored or controlled healthcare. Unfortunately, the gains made by these parties have been steadily eroded as capital went on the offensive with the advent of neoliberalism:

> Social democracy in Western Europe took shape under special historical circumstances: the strong communist movements, allied with the Soviet Union, existing in most European nations after World War II; the rapid economic growth that followed the

> massive rebuilding that took place after the war, aided by US aid and US exports; the need of European capital to cooperate with and make concessions to non-communist labor unions, if only to co-opt any future radicalization; and the strict capital controls and fixed currency exchange rates that facilitated national development. We live in an altogether different world today, one in which capital and the state are in a symbiotic relationship to dismantle social democracy, privatize social services, destroy labor unions and ensure capital's ability to do what it desires in every corner of the earth and every part of our lives.[41]

What is more, for all the good social democratic parties have done, they never challenged the lopsided distribution of wealth, which meant that no matter how many social welfare programs were implemented, power remained firmly in the hands of capital. As economist Michael Roberts points out, wealth is nearly as unequally distributed in each of the Scandinavian countries, the quintessential social democratic states, as it is in the United States.[42]

Labor parties, like unions, will have to be reconstructed. New parties must be built, democratic, with clear radical principles, leading the working class (and a worker-peasant alliance in much of the Global South) as a whole. Such parties must pressure existing states to satisfy the needs of the class and build the capacities of workers and peasants to gain control of their lives and start to build alternative structures of production and distribution. There are many possible models, from the local assembly-commune-national party schema in Venezuela to the scaling outward and upward of the Richmond Progressive Alliance in Richmond, California, or Cooperation Jackson in Jackson, Mississippi, to the Maoist parties in Nepal and rural India.[43]

Whether direct action, labor organization, or political efforts, it is critical to have an educational component. We all need to learn in cooperative settings without hierarchies. As historian Peter Linebaugh writes, "Communal values must be taught, and renewed, continuously."[44] Every member of every direct-action

group, labor organization, or political entity must agree as a condition of membership to take part in regular, structured education. One-day classes, short courses, summer schools, semesters—all are possible and necessary. History, political economy, cultural studies, law, agriculture, ecology, and many other subjects can prepare people to think critically and act decisively, pursuing a tactical goal or a long-term structural change.[45]

In the United States, every educational enterprise should make special efforts to address racism, patriarchy, and imperialism. These have been part and parcel of capitalism from its inception. They are also sources of conflict and contention in every working-class organization. Unless they are confronted in open discussion, a unified working class will remain a pipe dream. The uprisings over police violence and systemic racism have for the first time convinced a majority of white people in the United States of a reality many have long denied. Once one form of oppression is admitted, others can be more effectively challenged.

The pathetic response of the U.S. government to the pandemic calls for comparisons with many other countries. Education could challenge popular support for the mindless nationalism and disdain for the rest of the world that has been one of the most dominant set of blinders for the U.S. population, making us oblivious and uncaring about the havoc our country has wreaked upon the rest of the world. The economic fallout from the pandemic has landed more heavily on women and the lockdowns and widespread unemployment have brought home the crucial role women play in reproducing the social system. This is undoubtedly an opportunity to challenge patriarchy in the same way that it has been an opportunity to challenge racism.

Personal Responsibility

It is fitting to end this essay with the question of personal responsibility. What can each of us do to build a radical labor movement? What we can do will depend in large part on our circumstances

and skills. Some of us can educate, explaining the world in which we live clearly and in language that does not look at the working class from the outside, examining and analyzing it, but as part of it, teaching while we learn in dialogue with others. The left and the unions have done a miserable job of this. Worker education is a dead letter in almost all labor unions. There are a few decent programs in colleges and universities. And recently, an independent program has begun in Minneapolis-St. Paul, modeled after the old Brookwood Labor College.[46] However, much of the U.S. working class is sorely lacking in accessible educational resources on the nature of capitalist society. There is no reason why we cannot help to make such resources available.

In our places of employment, we can organize, not just those like us but all of the workers in our workplaces. We can learn how our employers function and how the goods or services we make are produced and sold from beginning to end. We can look for vulnerable points and strategize how to take advantage of these. We can try to form unions, especially independent organizations unless there is a good, existing union. We can educate ourselves about labor and safety and health laws, civil rights laws, unemployment compensation rules, and anything else that might be of value to the workers, including ourselves. Even in small groups, we can legally make demands of our bosses, and we can even engage in collective acts of solidarity to protect aggrieved individuals and groups.

We can, wherever possible, begin to think about and then build our networks of production and distribution as is being done now in Jackson, Mississippi.

We can be politically active. The triple crisis has opened new possibilities for fundamental change, and we had better take advantage of them. We may not have much of a future if we do not.

Postscript

BLS data on union membership, union density, and major strikes are now available for 2020. These should be read with caution

because of the pandemic's impact on employment. The large decline in the number of people working, compared to 2019, with nonunion workers overrepresented in this decline, has increased union density. At the same time, there has been a significant drop in total union membership. Union density in 2020 was 10.8 percent, an increase of half a percentage point over 2019. Yet, 2020 also saw a decline in union membership of 321,000. Both the private and the public sectors saw union density increases, but this was for the same reason, a significant loss of employment. There were only eight major strikes in 2020, the third-lowest since 1947. Health and education accounted for 75 percent of the 27,000 workers idled by these strikes. There were 965,700 workdays lost in the strikes, down significantly from 2019, accounting for a minuscule fraction of total workdays. Against these rather depressing numbers, there were a great many short stoppages, as employees continued to contest low wages and substandard and often dangerous working conditions.

> Payday Report has now recorded its 1,400th strike since we began tracking strikes at the beginning of the pandemic in March of 2020 with the latest strike coming from Topeka, Kansas, where over 500 Frito-Lay workers went on strike this Monday.
>
> The strike movement is now picking up momentum as the "Retail Worker Rebellion" grows.
>
> In recent weeks, we have seen a huge spike in strikes as videos of retail workers walking off the job go viral on platforms like Tik Tok, encouraging workers at other locations to post similar videos when they decided to walk off. In April alone, a record 649,000 retail workers quit their jobs as they are demanding more from their employers.
>
> On the Fourth of July weekend, we saw nearly a dozen walkoffs. In Ohio, Del Taco workers walked off the job, stating they "will not work for a company that does not care." Lifeguards in Maine walked off the job after a lifeguard captain was demoted for asking for pay raises. Dill Pickle workers walked off the job

in Chicago, with worker Kevin Taylor saying, "At the end of the day, it's standing up for what's right."

Now, more than 2,000 Kroger workers voted to strike in Arkansas.[47]

Combined with the unprecedented number of people quitting their jobs, with a resultant widespread labor shortage, circumstances are now favorable for renewed class struggle. Yet, as will be argued in the next chapter, much needs to be done if the working class is to fulfill its destiny as the agent for radical transformation.

9

Waging Class Struggle: From Principles to Practice

It is difficult to be optimistic about the likelihood of a radical, working-class led transformation of society. In the United States, the Black Lives Matter protests have waned, and although workers are quitting jobs by the millions and short strikes are everywhere, no labor movement is on the horizon. COVID-19 continues to kill people, yet millions seem to believe it is all a hoax. Politics continues to be a spectacle of misinformation and incompetence. The right is rising in many countries and has seized power in India, Hungary, and the Philippines, to name only the most frightening examples. Most disheartening are the global environmental catastrophes, which continue unabated, destroying the bases of human life itself. Social scientist James C. Scott suggests that humans are the most invasive of all animals and plants.[1] He has a point.

Pessimism doesn't allow us to capitulate. Life cannot go on the way it has. Radical change is not utopian; it is necessary. No liberal or social democratic program has any chance of avoiding our annihilation. Piecemeal efforts are useless unless they generate more comprehensive actions. Unfortunately, this has never been the case, and there is no reason to believe that it

will be going forward. In this final chapter, I have developed a comprehensive plan of attack for workers and their allies, not in the sense of specific tactics but in more general strategic terms.

It is essential to view class struggle in the broadest possible way. First, the protagonists in the war against capital are not just wage workers, the unemployed, those who have dropped out of the labor force for economic reasons, and all those laboring in the informal economy, whether in the sale of goods or services or as unpaid family members helping in such sales. They are also the women (and some men) who perform the unpaid labor that allows this system to reproduce itself. My mother, for example, not only gave birth to me, but she also cooked, cleaned, taught me how to behave in a socially appropriate manner, and did all of the things that allowed me to become a wage laborer. She was as much a member of the working class as my father or myself. The same is true for my partner, who did these for our children.

Second, there are those outside the wage-labor economy, namely the more than two billion peasant farmers globally and the much smaller group of indigenous gatherers and hunters. Workers must ally with these peoples because they suffer similar kinds of exploitation and expropriation, and their aims cannot be fulfilled in capitalism. In India, hundreds of thousands of farmers have been protesting government-imposed legislation hostile to the livelihoods of those who till the land. Large, semi-permanent encampments have been established outside Delhi. They achieved a great victory in December 2012 when the government agreed to rescind the laws. Tens of millions of wage workers conducted a 24-hour strike in November 2020 in support of the farmers. This is a good example of the need for worker/peasant alliances. It will be impossible for the working class to ignore a couple of billion people who could be vital in any revolutionary movement.[2]

Capitalism is a system of stark individualism.[3] For the capitalist system to reproduce itself, for its outcomes to become its suppositions, people must behave in a self-interested way. Mainstream economists assume that every social actor is an autonomous maximizer—an "I"—of something—profits or individual satisfaction from consuming and supplying labor. They spread this view to millions of students in nearly every introductory economics class taught in universities. As noted in chapter 2, there is some evidence suggesting that economics professors and students are less compassionate than others who have neither taught nor taken economics classes.[4] The primary institutions of capitalist society work in concert to inculcate the "I" in everyone, with the corollary that the social—a "We"—is detrimental to human welfare. It doesn't matter why we take self-centered actions; desire or fear serve equally well in terms of the needs of the dominant class, the imperative being the accumulation of capital.

For capitalism to end, the "I" must be suppressed, and the "We" must come to the fore. This statement would sound strange to the gatherers and hunters who inhabited the earth for almost all human existence. They had no word for "I" and saw no difference between themselves and the natural world around them. Their lives hinged on cooperation and sharing, and their rituals and institutions helped ensure that these were maintained. For them, the earth was a commons, the property of all. They managed their existence in ways harmonious with nature and kept the earth's metabolism in balance with their own. They were the original We.

Gatherers and hunters still exist in small numbers, hounded out of their isolated redoubts and forced to adapt to the modern world. Some have adapted; many have died. But the reality and idea of the commons lived on, and the We was often stronger than the I. Historian Peter Linebaugh tells us, "Scarcely a society has existed on the face of the earth which has not had at its heart the commons; the commodity with its individualism and privatization was

strictly confined to the margins of the community where severe regulations punished violators."[5] Before the capitalist factory and machinery enclosed workers in walled spaces and a mechanism determined the pace of their work, before the land was made into private property, egalitarian, sharing relationships dominated much of human life. Everywhere, peasants had customary rights to use common lands for everything from gathering firewood to gleaning after harvest. Farmers periodically redivided plots of land to ensure that each family had land of roughly equal crop yields. As late as 1688, one-quarter of the total area of England and Wales was common land.[6]

Even in early capitalist workplaces, craft workers had the right to keep excess materials. In shipbuilding, the workmen had the right to keep scrap lumber. Certainly, the slaves whose labor made the great acceleration of capital accumulation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries possible had memories of their commons in Africa, of the "We" that dominated their lives. It was surely this that inspired their collective revolts again their "masters." The notion that the earth belonged to all was a staple of religion. "The Franciscans say *juri divino omni sunt communia*, or by divine law all things are common."[7]

What the exploitation and expropriation central to capitalism meant historically was a war, waged by law and violence, against common ownership and customary group rights. The "I" was never natural and therefore had to be imposed. If the working class is to radically change the world, it must wage its war against the I and for the We, learning about and building on the struggles of the past.

What Does Changing the World Mean?

To transform the world, we first must have at least a general idea of the world we want to inhabit, and second, we need to know how to bring such a place into existence. We can start by stating that if capitalism is the source of the multiple woes facing the working

class and its peasant comrades-in-arms, then what we desire is the antithesis of capitalist society. This would mean the end of:

- Private ownership of the means of production, including land.
- Production for profit.
- The obsession with endless economic growth.
- The exploitation of wage labor.
- The expropriation of peasant land, urban and rural common spaces, the labor and bodies of women, Black bodies, and all forms of patriarchy and racism.
- The private plunder of the natural world.
- Imperialism.
- The pro-capitalist role of all institutions and mechanisms that reproduce society, from family to state and from education and media to the legal system.

To put matters bluntly, the rule of capital must be terminated. Because everything that must end is central to the unceasing accumulation of capital, it is impossible to abolish any of these within the confines of this system. There can be some lessening of exploitation and expropriation, won through various forms of struggle. Wage laborers can win safer workplaces; civil rights laws can improve the lives of women and people of color; imperial wars can sometimes be averted, or poor nations can win a bit of economic independence. Peasants can at least temporarily deny capital their land; a few decent politicians might win office; schools might improve some, and media might occasionally serve the public. But none of this subverts the ultimate power of the capitalist class, namely its monopoly of ownership of the world's productive property.

However, if we accept that capitalism must be superseded, it is fair to ask with what. The answer many on the left give is that we should not be designing the details of a future society. We will develop these as we attempt to change the world, seeing what works and what does not in practice. Perhaps so, but can we not at

least state in general but stirring terms what we seek? At a minimum, wouldn't the following demands be essential?

- A sustainable environment. What we appropriate from nature must be restored. We are headed for multiple environmental catastrophes threatening human existence. There will be no world for the working class to change if this isn't done. All economic decisions should be made with a sustainable environment a central determining factor.
- A planned economy. The anarchy of the marketplace should be replaced by conscious planning of what is produced. Periodic economic crises and unconscionable inequality are the direct results of reliance on the market. These are neither desirable nor necessary. Corporations plan, so why can't society do the same?
- Socialization of as much consumption as possible, especially transportation and childcare. Living arrangements could be more collective as well. Not only will this save resources, but it will also socialize us in ways supportive of feelings of belonging and happiness. We are social animals not meant to live isolated lives surrounded by unnecessary privately owned consumer goods.
- Democratic worker-community control of workplaces, with, to the extent possible, the elimination of the detailed division of labor and with machinery built and introduced with social usefulness as the guiding principle.
- Public ownership of all social reproduction institutions, from schools to media. The same should be the case for as much production as possible. In many cases, cooperatives run by workers and communities should be responsible for production and distribution decisions. Local supply is especially important for food, both in terms of transportation expenses and a healthy environment. It will be much easier to return nutrients to the soil organically when food is grown close to where it is consumed.
- A radically egalitarian society, with equality in all spheres of life—between men and women, among all racial and ethnic

groups, among all people irrespective of their gender identity or sexual preference, among and within every country concerning work, geography, and access to all social services and amenities.

The working class must be against a society built upon individualism and the rule of the many by the few. No social system with inequality of power and multiple hierarchies affecting most of life can be liberating, if liberation means living unalienated lives, lives in which we are not artificially and intentionally separated from one another, from what we produce, from our natures as thinking, purposive beings, and from the natural world. By contrast, the working class must be for whatever is social, collective, sharing, and unalienating.

The Multiple Terrains of Struggle

There are many arenas of class struggle. In each, there are both matters to fight against and to fight for. Any list must be somewhat arbitrary, but the following areas would seem essential.

A Statement of Principles and Commitments

Every organization and movement should have a statement of the principles and commitments that underlie them. These can be general declarations, or they can take the form of demands. For example, suppose it is higher education that is being contested. In that case, a declaration could be "Free higher education is a right," and demands could be "Make adjunct teachers full-time professors" and "Abolish student debt." Organized Black Americans might demand some form of reparations for the depredations of slavery. A specific call could be an end to the racist U.S. bail bond system.[8] Poor women might insist on the abolition of workfare and publicly financed family allowances. "Land to the tiller," used by the Chinese revolutionaries, still resonates today in places where peasant land is being expropriated. Those organizing protests and

those joining an organization can make formal commitments. "I will never cross a picket line" in a union strike setting is an obvious pledge. In anti-imperial efforts, "I will not join the military" starkly proclaims that a person will not participate in the violence, including murder, that always grounds the subjugation of the people of another country by the aggressor nation.

If there is a primary organization, such as a political party, the principles would take on a more general, but encompassing, character. In the United States, for example, a set of transitional demands, that is, those aimed at applying pressure to capital and which could, if put into practice, pave the way for a transition to socialism, might include:

- Much shorter working hours.
- Early and secure retirement.
- Free universal healthcare.
- An end to the link between work and income.
- An end to all corporate subsidies.
- The immediate termination of all forms of discrimination.
- Bans on fracking and other profit-driven environmental despoliations.
- An end to the war on terror as well as closings of U.S. military bases in other countries.
- The abolition of the prison system.
- Free schooling at all levels.
- Open borders combined with the termination of U.S. financial support for oppressive governments.
- Community-based policing.
- Transfer of abandoned buildings and land to communities and groups that will put them to socially useful purposes.[9]

Every proclamation of principles must contain firm commitments to ending patriarchy and racism. These exist as such significant cleavages within the working class that they can never be ignored.

Statements and commitments are rare today, but that makes them all the more important. People naturally gravitate toward organizations and leaders that have standards from which they do not deviate. Former U.S. president Barack Obama said, when he was a candidate, that he would put on walking shoes and join striking picketers. But he never did. He often said one thing and then did the opposite. Mao Zedong said that land would go to the peasants who worked it, and that is what was done. Who do you think has, to this day, more committed admirers? Karl Marx stuck to his fundamental principles no matter the consequences. His analyses changed as he learned more about how societies functioned. But he never changed his mind about the nature of capitalism, and he devoted his life to destroying capital's power. No wonder he is held in the highest esteem by tens of millions of people.

Radical Education

In discussing "commoning"—the act of doing things in common, such as working in a community garden or caring for a forest that is used by an indigenous group of peasants in India—Peter Linebaugh says, "Communal values must be taught, and renewed, continuously."[10] Parents, churches, civic organizations, and the like might try to inculcate such values in the children and members; when people engage in collective struggles, they learn them. However, it takes more than this to make collective ways of thinking an integral part of our lives, providing, in effect, a compass that gives us direction. Radical, critical, and continued education is needed. It will not only help to put our lives and actions into context, but it will also give us a better understanding of what needs to be done in the future. Through it, we can learn to analyze our individual histories, to, in effect, examine and pass judgments on ourselves.

There are many elements in radical education. First, there must be a relationship of mutual respect between teacher and student. That is, both must feel part of a larger project, the liberation of

humanity from the shackles of capitalism. While the teachers have specialized knowledge, they learn from their students in a give-and-take process of democratic discussion. If education isn't egalitarian, how can we expect anything else to be? Second, those who teach must, whatever the venue, direct the conversation toward the nature of the system. A science teacher can ask, what influences the questions asked of science? How is science funded? Is what a scientist does value-free? Then, pose a question such as, why is so little government funding given to researchers who want to know the possible consequences of genetically modified organisms? In social sciences, one could ask how likely it would be for a scholar to earn a PhD if the thesis subject is "How can a guerrilla army best defeat the U.S. armed forces in [Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Haiti, take your pick]?"

In labor education, the question "What is capitalism?" is paramount. The teacher must try to show that this system rests on a bedrock of exploitation and expropriation. Even if a class is about a practical matter, such as labor law or organizing a union, the nature of society is critical to explaining what the law is and why unions are necessary. In all organizations, whether they are fighting for a cleaner environment, better housing, lower rents, converting abandoned urban land to community gardens, ending the theft of peasant lands, socialized healthcare, ending racism and patriarchy, or the termination of wars and imperialism, capitalism must be central to the teaching and learning. It might seem that teaching the nature of capitalism is a daunting task, but peasants have been taught the rudiments of the three volumes of Karl Marx's magnum opus, *Capital*. Nothing is impossible.

Third, every entity seeking radical change must have an education component integral to its operation. Labor unions and peasant organizations need to set aside time and resources for this. Most unions in the United States have little or no member education, much less radical education. This is one reason why the rank and file are alienated from the leadership. Not a few union officers fear an educated membership, which might decide to replace them. Political

parties and formations, Occupy Wall Street types of actions, anti-war organizations, anti-racist and anti-patriarchy movements need education efforts as well, permanent if possible. Planning actions, carrying them out, assessing successes and failures—all are vital subjects of education for members and participants.

Fourth, radical education is about making connections. One organization's projects are connected to those of every other group; each person's life is part of a larger whole.

> For example, any efforts to end "clopening" [employers scheduling workers to close a workplace, often a restaurant, late at night and then open the shop early the next morning] could be tied directly to the need for shorter hours and more free time, which, in turn, could allow us to pose the question of why employers have the power to determine how we labor and with what intensity. Irregular and stressful shift work could even be connected to U.S. imperialism, which helps global corporations dispossess peasants in poor countries, forcing them unwillingly to migrate to rich nations where they intensify labor market competition and increase capital's power. . . . [Also,] whatever relatively small or local changes we fight for should always be connected to larger and more global principles. Suppose that a coalition of progressive organizations seeks to end city tax subsidies to the builders of luxury condominiums. Why not tie this endeavor to demands for quality, low-rent public housing, the considerable destruction of which is caused by the luxury consumption of the wealthy, and our commitment to limit our own discretionary consumption?[11]

Racism, patriarchy, and imperialism are all connected to exploitation and expropriations, as is climate change. Radical education, by showing why this is so, can help to ignite the class consciousness necessary to change the world.

Fifth, whatever the setting, start with the lives, the daily experiences, of the students. Education scholar and teacher Ira Shor:

> begins a writing class with community college students by examining the chairs on which they are sitting. He first has them carefully describe the chairs, forcing them to look at them carefully and slowly. However, the description is just the beginning; through discussion and more writing, Shor and his students discover the chair's origin within the economy and the cultural assumptions behind its production (e.g., why it's so uncomfortable!). Ultimately, the students, mostly through their own efforts, are able to divest the chair of its commodity fetishism by totally understanding it in relation to the society which produced it. The complete exercise not only demystifies the chair itself, but gives a striking experimental demonstration of how to analyze capitalism and of the dialectical method of understanding one's own environment.[12]

Labor educator and *Monthly Review* co-founder Leo Huberman gives a striking example of radical and critical teaching. He asks his worker-students a series of simple questions about their lives as working men and women. Where do you work? Why do you work? Does the man who owns the factory work alongside you? Have you ever seen the stockholders of the corporation working in the plant? But you all agreed you had to work to live; now you tell me there are some people who live without working. How come? Then there are two groups of people in our society. One group, to which you belong, lives by…? And the other group to which your employer belongs lives by…? The questions continue until the teacher and the students see that profits are unearned and come at the expense of the sweat and tears of those who perform the labor. It's a brilliant exercise, eliciting from the students the most basic elements of their work lives and generating a lively discussion of what they might do about it.[13]

Sixth, radical educators should teach so that some of the students will themselves take what they have learned and teach it to others. The goal is to create organic intellectuals, that is, people from the working class who become capable of spreading the word

the way Leo Huberman did. Some of the prisoners I once taught took my lecture diagrams, which I had copied and distributed, to their cellblocks, where they used them to teach fellow inmates. Similarly, union members can teach their brothers and sisters, as some whom I taught did. Not only does this greatly increase the number of teachers, but it also breaks down the hierarchy between instructors and pupils.

Agriculture, Peasants, Farmworkers, and the Environment

A radically changed world cannot come to exist if the environment is wrecked beyond repair and if there is not enough food to eat. Capitalist agriculture is large-scale, machine- and chemical-intensive, overloaded with pesticides, and destructive of the quality of air, water, and land. Billions of pounds of pesticides are used every year worldwide, most of which end up in the air, soil, and water.[14] Our industrial agriculture is based upon extensive use of fossil fuels, and a great deal of land is used to produce crops not for human consumption but for animal feed and biofuels. Agriculture contributes considerably to global warming. "In 2007, the U.S. food system, from farm to table, used 16 percent of all of the country's energy."[15] This energy derives from fossil fuels, the main contributor to global warming. In terms of energy expended in production and energy generated by the crops, it is incredibly inefficient, even compared to food production in gathering and hunting societies. "It now takes more energy to produce food than we obtain from eating it: every calorie of food energy requires 10 calories of fossil energy."[16] Most of the vegetables, fruits, meats, and fish that are agriculture's end products are heavily processed before being consumed, which means that they are stripped of nutrients and adulterated with thousands of additives, from coloring to sweeteners.

Modern agriculture gives the world an enormous amount of food, but its distribution is as unequal as are income and wealth. The well-off have a high daily caloric intake, whereas the poor are

food-deprived. Estimates of the number of hungry people worldwide vary, ranging from about 850 million to more than two billion people.[17] At the same time, peasants and small farmers often live on the edge of calamity or cannot eke out a living. They are being driven from their farms by land-grabbing capitalists, aided by governments and international financial organizations like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Land has become a valuable commodity, and speculators, including hedge fund managers, have been on a buying spree in the Global South. The result is either industrial farming or idle land, as owners wait for prices to rise. The sale of the land has frequently been preceded by violence and death.[18] A report from the International Land Coalition states:

> Today, it is estimated that there are approximately 608 million farms in the world, and most are still family farms. However, the largest 1% of farms operate more than 70% of the world's farmland and are integrated into the corporate food system, while over 80% are smallholdings of less than two hectares that are generally excluded from global food chains. Although patterns vary significantly from region to region, since 1980 in all regions land concentration has either been increasing significantly (North America, Europe, Asia and the Pacific) or a decreasing trend has been reversed (Africa and Latin America). In most low-income countries, we see an increasing number of farms in combination with smaller and smaller farm sizes, while in higher-income countries large farms are getting bigger.[19]

The 866 million farm workers, many former or current peasants, suffer short life expectancies, pesticide poisoning, and state-sponsored violence whenever they attempt to organize. Their working conditions are extraordinarily harsh, and their prospects for decent lives are nonexistent.

Agriculture is organized now on a factory model, with enormous operational scale, subcontractors, maximum production control and uniformity, with little concern for either the quality of

the food or the health of workers and the earth. Cattle, hogs, and chickens are raised in grotesquely inhumane conditions, overfed with food laced with growth supplements so that they reach maturity as quickly as possible. They are sent to market in an unhealthy state more often than consumers imagine.[20]

A radical change of the world requires that agriculture be revolutionized, away from giant "factories in the fields" that poison and overheat the environment, leave so many hungry, and maximally exploit and expropriate the working class. Such change is a primary necessity because if the earth is ruined and humanity cannot be adequately fed, then there is no hope at all. Fortunately, we do know how to organize a food system that avoids what is happening now.

Peasants, small farmers, and farmworkers have the skills and experience to produce food in an earth-sustaining, productive, and collective manner. They are already doing this and organizing against industrial agriculture and for smaller-scale, more local, and ecologically nourishing food production and distribution. The working class must support such endeavors and engage in them wherever possible. Worker-peasant alliances will be needed in the Global South and even in the Global North. Following are some examples.

Most wage workers live in or near cities, the consequence of the "metabolic rift" that Marx and others have analyzed. One way to heal this rift is to produce food in urban areas, on abandoned land, in community gardens, on rooftops, on balconies and porches, and in vertical farms. Cuba provides the best example of this approach.[21] After the 1990–91 demise of the Soviet Union, which had provided Cuba with its oil, the country embarked upon an ambitious farming plan without fossil fuels and mechanization. Research had been done and some experience gained before this, but now the nation embraced organic, non-mechanized farming wholeheartedly. Special attention was given to urban areas, most notably Havana, where various types of small-scale organic agriculture were employed. The result is a network of plots and farms

inside the city, producing fresh vegetables and fruits, supplying seeds, creating thousands of jobs, generating income, and providing markets for agricultural inputs made elsewhere in the country.

Some units are privately owned; others are organized as cooperatives. Food is consumed directly by the producers, sold in markets (selling to tourists provides foreign exchange for imports), or sold at state-mandated low prices to schools, hospitals, and other social entities. Education, training, and management are both centralized and decentralized, the motto being, "Produce while learning, teach while producing, and learn while teaching." Cuba has a well-educated, learn-by-doing population that is used to engaging in collective efforts. Many persons are knowledgeable about agroecological science and methods, with experts willing to learn from those who have long practiced traditional farming. The expectation is that production will satisfy needs and not the capital accumulation imperative of capitalist economies. Hardships imposed by the harsh sanctions placed upon the island by the United States have hardened Cubans against adversity.[22] Remarkably, they have managed to build urban agriculture that now can satisfy the fresh fruit and vegetable needs of a city with two million inhabitants. It is not miraculous, but it shows that capitalist industrial agriculture is not a human imperative. There are alternatives.

Urban agriculture is not unique to Cuba. It is found in many cities, including some in the United States. In Detroit, abandoned land has been converted to food production, organized collectively by community activists:

> The Oakland Avenue Farmers' Market in Detroit's North End is one of those small-but-mighty neighborhood markets that accomplishes a lot with a little. Each Saturday, it offers fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthy foods in a historically low-income and black neighborhood where such options aren't readily available. Just as important is its contribution to the neighborhood's economy. Most of the profits generated since it launched in 2009 fund the adjacent Oakland Avenue Farm. That

> operation provides 13 full- and part-time time jobs that pay a living wage—also rare in the North End—in addition to teaching residents to grow and cook their own food. So supporting the Oakland Market is a small contribution to the neighborhood's economy.[23]

As in Cuba, women have been at the forefront of urban farming in Detroit, as have people of color. There are more than one thousand community gardens in the city, part of a movement spearheaded by the late radical philosopher and activist Grace Lee Boggs, who

> sees urban gardening as the beginning of a major shift in the way we feed ourselves as well as a way to connect generations in a widely inclusive movement. . . .
>
> "There's a group on the east side called Feed 'Em Freedom Growers; if you don't have food you can't be free. Detroit has over 1,000 community gardens. Urban agriculture started very simply with some African-American women seeing some vacant lots. That's how big changes take place, with small changes. Important changes always start from the bottom up. We think they come from the top, or start with millions of people. No, they start when some people respond to the historical context and do what needs to be done. That's how revolution takes place."[24]

Vertical farms are another way to produce food in cities:

> No. 212 Rome Street, in Newark, New Jersey, used to be the address of Grammer, Dempsey & Hudson, a steel-supply company. It was like a lumberyard for steel, which it bought in bulk from distant mills and distributed in smaller amounts, mostly to customers within a hundred-mile radius of Newark. It sold off its assets in 2008 and later shut down. In 2015, a new indoor-agriculture company called AeroFarms leased the property. It had the rusting corrugated-steel exterior torn down and a new

> building erected on the old frame. Then it filled nearly seventy thousand square feet of floor space with what is called a vertical farm. The building's ceiling allowed for grow tables to be stacked twelve layers tall, to a height of thirty-six feet, in rows eighty feet long. The vertical farm grows kale, bok choi, watercress, arugula, red-leaf lettuce, mizuna, and other baby salad greens.[25]

The technology of vertical farming is relatively simple, but the care of the plants is complicated and requires sophisticated knowledge of biology and electronic communication. However, these things can be mastered; a small-scale version of a vertical farm has been installed in a Newark elementary school, where staff and students keep it up and running.[26]

The advantages of urban farming are many. It provides food for local consumption, and it generates some employment. From it can come backward and forward linkages. Farms need inputs, some of which might be supplied locally. They can also be connected to farmers' markets, grocery stores, schools, hospitals, and prisons. Worker cooperatives could run the markets, schools, and stores. Through such activity, the working class learns forms of collective self-help, gaining confidence in its capacity to organize production. What is more, the "We" is central and is reinforced continually. Moreover, urban agriculture gets workers closer to nature, and with a better grasp of nature's metabolism they are more likely to heed the warnings of ecological doom.

In both the Global North and the Global South, numerous small farmers and peasants have embraced agroecological farming, using practices thousands of years old and modern science-based techniques. There are many and varied ways to farm agroecologically, but the goal is to create a balance between humans and nature, constantly replenishing the earth with the nutrients necessary for the continuous production of food. Some of the ways to do this include abandoning chemical fertilizers by using legumes to fix nitrogen in the soil; using natural pest controls; limiting tilling of the soil; planting a variety of mutually supporting fruits and

vegetables and avoiding monocropping; mixing crops with animal husbandry, with manure from the animals used for the plants; using drip irrigation in dry climates and water-capturing techniques; creating mosaic landscapes in which farm and non-farm habitats such as forests, streams, and wetlands are interspersed to increase biodiversity; controlling water runoff and erosion through, among other things, planting of cover crops; and many others. Such farming shows considerable productivity gains.[27] When combined with cooperation and collective production, social consciousness can change sharply.[28]

Like every radical change, altering the way food is produced and distributed meets with resistance from capital. Class struggle around agriculture is widespread. In the Amazon River Basin, peasants have been fighting against the construction of massive dams, which destroy traditional common areas and farm fields, with accompanying environmental damage both downstream and upstream from the dams.[29] Maoist political parties and their military wings have organized Indian forest dwellers to contest land grabs. At various times over the past fifty years, guerrillas have secured control over indigenous territories and helped to build cooperative agriculture, following the process begun by Mao's Red Army in China.[30]

In Brazil, a Landless Workers Movement (MST are its Portuguese initials) has been in operation since the early 1980s. Now, with more than one million members, MST has orchestrated the seizure of unoccupied and unproductive lands throughout the country. Peasants are settled—several hundred thousand to date—on these parcels, food is grown, and a network of schools, cooperatives, and credit unions is established. "The movement has ratified over 2,000 settlements, settling over 370,000 families with an estimated 80,000 more awaiting settlement, established a network of approximately 2,000 primary and secondary schools, partnered with 13 public universities, 160 rural cooperatives, 4 credit unions, and started food processing plants, and retail outlets."[31] The MST's slogan is "Occupy, Resist, Produce," a wonderful

summary of the need to combine protest with collective self-help that satisfies people's material needs.[32]

In the farmworker town of Immokalee, Florida, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), a community-based labor group, has forced some of the nation's largest tomato-buying fast-food chains to pay a premium for tomatoes picked by its members. This money then goes to the workers. Aided by a national network of "churches, students, and consumer activists," the CIW organized boycotts of the restaurants, which helped win concessions from the chains, who then sign on to the CIW's Fair Food Program. The program offers worker-to-worker education sessions, a worker-triggered complaint resolution mechanism, and health and safety committees on every participating farm. The group also investigates, publicizes, and aids the prosecution of slavery rings that supply workers to unscrupulous growers.[33]

Workers and peasants everywhere have an obligation to support these struggles and all like them, with publicity, mutual assistance, and funds when possible. Whatever improvements peasants, farmers, and farmworkers make in their lives, the healthier the earth is. And the more livable rural areas are, the more they will attract new residents, including the return of peasants from the degrading urban slums that are now their homes. As this happens, the metabolic rift that separated people from the land in the first place can begin to heal.

Labor Unions

Labor unions have been a principal response by workers to capital's exploitation. They are necessary defense agents, and as long as capitalism exists, they will form. In chapters 7 and 8, we saw how unions could improve wage laborers' lives—and critiqued their shortcomings. What might unions do to attack the power of the class enemy more directly?

If unions mirror corporations in their structures, which all too many do, there isn't much hope that they will confront capital.

And this is even more so if they have entered a compact with employers that views the two sides as cooperators interested primarily in the profitability of the owners' businesses. This strategy has failed, the proof being in the deteriorating working conditions and life circumstances of union members and the sharp drop in union densities during the period in which partnership has marked most labor movements worldwide. First and foremost, labor unions must become democratic, run by the membership, and they must abandon labor-management cooperation schemes. Since it is unlikely that current leaders will seek to do either of these things, the only way forward is to get rid of the leadership. In the United States, a perusal of the magazine *Labor Notes* shows that there have been frequent attempts by rank-and-file activists to take control of their unions and put them on a democratic and militant path. A few have been successful, but most have not. Undoubtedly, the fear of such insurgencies has made some unions willing to mobilize members and take on the companies with strikes, picketing, and boycotts. But reform has proved a daunting task, similar to efforts by political advocates in the United States to move the Democratic Party to the left. Those in power seldom want to relinquish control, and they will be as ruthless as necessary to beat back rivals.[34]

Still, labor rebellions have been successful. In the United States, corrupt criminal leadership was defeated in both the Teamsters and the United Mine Workers, for example. Though the rank-and-file victors were subsequently defeated or weakened, neither union is as awful as it once was.[35] In addition, sometimes revolt has taken the form of a new union, one that breaks away from the parent organization. Or, if a group of workers has no representation, and no existing union is willing to help them organize, they might establish an independent union. Again in the United States, an example of the former is the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW). Tired of the Service Employees International Union's (SEIU) top-down management, its embrace of labor-management cooperation and sweetheart deals with employers,

its frequent impositions of trusteeships (the national union takes over the running of a local union) on recalcitrant locals with rebellious and independent leaders, and outright corruption, the NUHW broke away from SEIU in 2009.

Before asking what a democratic union looks like and should do, it is proper to say that there are existing unions that work democratically. In the United States, the best example is the United Electrical Workers. This independent labor union has the distinction of being kicked out of both the AFL and the CIO. Its national office and locals rest on the will of the members. It does not make deals with employers, and it has never been tainted with corruption. Officer salaries and expenses are strictly controlled, and its constitution is a model of democratic principles that the union has adhered to through good times and bad.[36] Other U.S. unions have served their members well, too. The same is true in Europe and many other countries, as in the Australian union led by Jack Mundey, discussed in chapter 8. The overall trajectory, however, has been toward bureaucratic, undemocratic structures and increasingly unwarranted faith in labor-capital compromise.[37]

Democracy means more than voting. The structure of the union must be democratic. There should be direct ballot casting by all the members for any office, as opposed to convention delegates, usually chosen by the leadership, voting for those same leaders, as is common in many U.S. unions. Term limits for officers are essential. No advantage should be proffered to incumbents seeking reelection. Strict limits should be placed on union officers' salaries, and a careful open audit of expenses should be routine. The rank and file should participate in all union activities, from planning for negotiations, setting demands, strike preparation, and striking and picketing. Union meetings should be open to all members, especially those with responsibilities at home (almost always women), and thus should be held at convenient times. Meeting discussions should be open, and criticisms should be welcomed and debated. Particular attention should be paid, in all aspects of the union, to the concerns and needs of racial and ethnic minorities and

LGBTQ members. Retirees should be encouraged to take part in all union actions.

If a rank-and-file uprising is successful, a breakaway union is founded, or an independent union is created, with democracy as a goal, it is still necessary to ask: Democracy for what? What are the principles and goals of the organization? The NUHW lists these as its core beliefs:

- A strong union is led by its members.
- Worker power is the foundation of a just society.
- Quality patient care requires that caregivers have a voice in their workplaces and are protected from retaliation.
- Healthcare is a human right.[38]

This is a good preliminary set of principles. But more needs to be said and done. First, education must be a priority. Compulsory classes should greet new members, teaching them about the union's history and labor movement. And regular short courses, summer schools, and longer learning experiences should be made available, with at least some courses required to maintain membership. In these classes, the construction of a broader array of principles and aspirations can be developed. Several come to mind:

- An examination of racism and patriarchy. The objectives would be ending discrimination in the union, building greater solidarity, compelling the employer to behave in a nondiscriminatory manner, and leading the union to play a positive role in combating these divisions in the community and society.
- A study of imperialism and militarism. For unions in the Global North, the purpose of such study would be to build an understanding of the role of their governments and employers in subjugating the peoples of the Global South and the past complicity of unions in this. A radical labor movement cannot become a reality unless it is adamantly opposed to imperial wars, arms production and sales, the infiltration of the military

into local economies and daily life, the patriotism of flags and national anthems, and the mantra that we must all support the troops. In the Global North, nationalism is a disease that impedes the global working-class solidarity essential for human liberation. Unfortunately, it is so deeply embedded in the institutional structure of capitalist society that the task of eliminating it is formidable. Yet, if the effort isn't made, there is no hope of the working class changing the world. The angle of vision on these subjects will be different in the Global South, although the ruling classes there often act in lockstep with those in the Global North.

- A serious discussion of the multiple environmental crises we face. If these aren't working-class issues, what are? In both Egypt and Syria, extreme drought, following years of austerity economic policies, growing inequality, and public corruption triggered revolts by workers and peasants during the Arab Spring in December 2010.[39]

This last point merits more detail. These events are surely harbingers of things to come. Furthermore, global warming is a workplace issue. Ecology professor and writer Andreas Malm writes:

> Physical labour makes the body warm. If it takes place under the sun or inside facilities without advanced air-conditioning systems, excessively high temperatures will make the sweat flow more profusely and the bodily powers sag, until the worker suffers heat exhaustion or worse. This will not be an ordeal for the average software developer or financial adviser. But for people who pick vegetables, build skyscrapers, pave roads, drive buses, sew clothes in poorly ventilated factories or mend cars in slum workshops, it already is; and the bulk of exceptionally hot working days are now anthropogenic in nature. With every little rise in average temperatures on Earth, thermal conditions in millions of workplaces around the world shift further, primarily in the

> tropical and subtropical regions where the majority of the working population—some four billion people—live their days. For every degree, a greater chunk of output will be lost, estimated to reach more than a third of total production after four degrees: in this heat, workers simply cannot keep up the same pace.[40]

Given the magnitude of impending disasters, labor must make the environment a central concern. This means opposing all corporate and public actions that exacerbate global warming, the poisoning of air, soil, water, and species extinction, among others. When construction unions lobby for ruinous shale oil pipelines, as happened in the United States, other unions must speak out and condemn such self-serving deeds.

As democratic unions strengthen and their principles and goals become more class-conscious, they will naturally ally with like-minded unions and sociopolitical bodies. In this way, a labor movement worthy of the name can begin and grow, one concerned with the entirety of the working class, including those potential workers in what Marx called the "reserve army of labor" and in the informal sector.

A union's most important immediate concern is with its members' welfare, and here the question of "democracy for what?" can take concrete form. Labor-management cooperation should be immediately and permanently rejected, replaced by an adversarial relationship that makes no concessions to management. Instead, the union makes demands that challenge capital's control of the workplace. Higher wages are always on the table, but shorter hours, more paid time off, full parental leave for both parents (for at least a few months), a safe and nontoxic work environment, active union participation in decisions related to both technology and work intensity, an unrestricted right to strike over any issue, a shortened grievance resolution procedure (with rank-and-file participation at all levels), the right not to cross picket lines while on employer-related business, and high monetary penalties for plant closures and relocations.

Whatever makes laboring less alienated and weakens capital's control should be vigorously and relentlessly pursued. Unions should never allow the employer to play one plant off against another, much less cooperate in this, as the United Auto Workers has done.[41] Strong protections for women and racial and ethnic minorities should be part of every contract. When a union faces a multi-plant employer or more than one employer, it should organize coordinated communications and tactics among the officers on the shop floor, office, or store. Solidarity must be more than a word, and an injury to any worker should anger every sister and brother.

Although democracy, principles, and radical goals are necessary everywhere, unions in the Global South encounter some particular choices and difficulties. There, wage laborers need to consider the needs and actions of peasants. In Brazil, for example, unions felt they should lead the way on land reform issues. "Many in large Brazilian labor unions believed the fight for agrarian reform should take place within union ranks—but unions didn't accept landless farmers as members."[42] Even if one were to argue that this was shortsighted, it still didn't preclude active union support for what the farmers and peasants were doing. In India, labor unions have failed to offer full-throated support for the Maoist rebellions in the countryside.[43] A worker-peasant alliance is essential for the working class to change the world, and until wage laborers embrace it, such change will not happen.

In many countries, attempts to unionize put workers at risk of arrest, imprisonment, or death. In Colombia, murders of labor activists have been routine. "Anti-union violence has been endemic to Colombia for decades, with roughly 3,000 organizers killed by assassins and paramilitaries over the last quarter-century [roughly 1989 to 2014]. . . . In fact, more than half of all murders for union-organizing activity worldwide take place here. But as murder numbers have dropped in recent years, the nature of the violence is changing, and there's evidence to suggest that the Colombian state is complicit in the repression."[44] In China, the

state allows only official unions, which are not independent agents of the working class. Attempts to confront global corporations like Walmart with their own unions put employees in the government's crosshairs. Arrests and jail sentences are common. In such onerous conditions, labor must often operate in secrecy, underground, and try to take actions in such large numbers that the state finds it hard to suppress. Strict media censorship further hampers the working class. Despite these barriers, workers still rebel, often with mass demonstrations and militancy. Sometimes, they win demands made on the companies and even secure concessions from the government.

It is essential to understand that workers and peasants have continued to organize and act despite weaknesses, a lack of democracy, the long-term strategy of cooperation with employers, nationalism, racism, and patriarchy. Today, in France, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, China, India, Algeria, Indonesia, South Africa, nearly everywhere in the world, there have been strikes and demonstrations; land, building, and factory occupations; sabotage, and open warfare. These show signs of intensifying as capitalism suffers recurring crises and shows itself as unable to satisfy the most basic needs of billions of human beings. There is undoubtedly a base for the construction of a new world.

There are also union-like groups that take up the cause of the working class. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and the Chinese Staff and Workers Association, discussed above, are examples. Both are "worker centers," of which there are many in the United States. Workers' centers are community-based organizations, some independent and some affiliated with the official labor movement. Many take up immigrant issues, while others function as de facto unions. Labor activist Elly Leary, in an essay about the CIW, argues:

> Non-union working-class organizations dealing with worker issues have a central place in the labor movement. Generally smaller in size than many union locals, workers' centers have

> the flexibility to experiment with different methods of engaging workers and training leaders. Furthermore, given the right's success in creating an anti-union climate (by popularizing the view that unions are obsolete), centers can appeal to broad sections of the working class that unions may have a difficult time reaching. Anti-union laws and recent decisions by courts and the National Labor Relations Board have narrowed how unions can fight and what they can win. If we add to this the frustrating discussion currently going on in the trade union movement about its future, workers' centers seem to hold great promise. But we shouldn't throw out the baby with the bathwater. If our movement were to rely exclusively on workers' centers to organize the working class for fundamental social change, we would find that there aren't enough centuries to build at this pace. Nonetheless, workers' centers are an essential basis for struggle.[45]

Cooperation between unions and worker centers could be a strategy to rebuild labor movements. Suppose that in every large and medium-size town a worker center was opened for restaurant labor. Any cook, dishwasher, or server could join from any place that prepared food. The center would be a space where workers could meet one another and discuss common problems at work and home. The center could provide education, useful materials, and advice for dealing with employers. It could spearhead organizing drives at particular establishments, or, if there were enough members, sponsor employer-wide unionization. Language study could be provided for those, and there might be many, who are not literate in the country's language. Similar centers could be built for other occupations and establishments. Mutual support could be a prerequisite for joining a center. Regional and national coordinating bodies might naturally follow from the successes of local centers.

Labor and Politics

What has been said about unions can be applied equally to

labor's political path, so just a few points can be made here. First, substantive equality must prevail in political entities, just as it must in labor unions. Social democratic parties will have to be replaced by democratic working-class parties. Here, too, democracy is more than voting. Those in the party must run it. It must have radical principles and have radical goals. It must be built from the ground up, with those at the top responsible to those at the bottom. Perhaps the course followed in Venezuela (discussed below) is a good model. Local assemblies seize the political initiative, and then the assemblies begin to consolidate in larger geographical areas, culminating in a national party. These could then ally themselves with similar parties in other countries. At each level, the forming groups would commit to a set of principles.

Second, working-class political parties can contend for state power, but in most cases this isn't likely to result in electoral victory. Education could then be the modus operandi of the party. In any case, radical pressure on the existing state should always be exerted. If special circumstances allow electoral victory, radical goals should be enunciated, and movement toward achieving them should begin immediately. The collective power of the working class should be the weapon employed to do this—mass demonstrations and strikes, for example. The military must be challenged, and most of its officers must be demobilized. There could be cases in which a party has a military wing, in parts of the Global South, for example. Then revolutionary warfare can be considered, as in Nepal in the early part of this century or in the Indian countryside, where it has been happening over the past several decades.

Another model for working-class politics is the Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA), a labor-community coalition in the U.S. city of Richmond, California. The RPA functions year-round as a political entity, with a dues-paying, diverse base and a multi-issue agenda, but it actively runs candidates for local office. Since 2004, its nominees have won many offices, including mayor. It

operates on a democratic basis, and it has regularly debated and found ways to maintain and increase both the diversity of its membership and the breadth and depth of its program. It works with community groups and local labor unions to address issues of great concern to the working class. The RPA and the local government, over which its victorious candidates have considerable influence, have fought for rent control, pollution abatement at the large Chevron oil refinery, against police brutality, and for a community-based model of policing, against the harassment of immigrants by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and many other issues. The RPA also has taken stances on national and international matters, such as demanding an end to the blockade of Cuba by the U.S. government.

The RPA does not take corporate money, nor do its office seekers. It is also independent of the Democratic Party. One of its leaders, longtime union activist Mike Parker, suggests that the Richmond model could be applied to many towns and cities. He notes that although local politics cannot solve many critical problems, what people learn fighting for the betterment of the places they live in usually translates into concern for such matters and a greater willingness to speak out and organize around them. Consciousness, in other words, stems from action, and study and education inform what people are willing to do.[46] Were RPA organizations to form in many places, they could coalesce into regional and national political bodies.

Third, there is no reason for a working-class political project to exist unless its aim is to defeat capital. Demands should be radical and principled, and they should be adhered to. Tactical compromise might sometimes be necessary, but this can never be a strategy. We know that coping with a rapidly warming planet and many other environmental catastrophes will be central to all politics. A labor party, therefore, must address ecological questions directly and forcefully. Ecologist Andreas Malm offers ten policies that could be implemented to begin the mitigation of ongoing ecological destruction:

1. Enforce a complete moratorium on all new facilities for extracting coal, oil, or natural gas.
2. Close down all power plants running on such fuels.
3. Draw 100 percent of electricity from non-fossil sources, primarily wind and solar.
4. Terminate the expansion of air, sea, and road travel; convert road and sea travel to electricity and wind; ration remaining air travel to ensure a fair distribution until it can be completely replaced with other means of transport.
5. Expand mass transit systems on all scales, from subways to intercontinental high-speed trains.
6. Limit the shipping and flying of food and systematically promote local supplies.
7. End the burning of tropical forests and initiate massive programs for reforestation.
8. Refurbish old buildings with insulation and require all new ones to generate their own zero-carbon power.
9. Dismantle the meat industry and move human protein requirements toward vegetable sources.
10. Pour public investment into the development and diffusion of the most efficient and sustainable renewable energy technologies, as well as technologies for carbon dioxide removal.[47]

No doubt, these policies will seem utopian to many people. But they are necessary, Malm points out, just to get us started on the road to a sustainable environment. Surely a radical working-class party, especially in the Global North, which is responsible for most of the devastation, should be expected to make such demands central to its work.

Fourth, labor parties can support and partly fund the mutual aid efforts workers and peasants initiate. Some of these are described below in the subsection "Direct Action." Worker education schools, cooperatives, community gardens, and daycare centers, for example, should be supported by these parties, and attacks on them should be countered politically.

Racism and Patriarchy

These terrains of class struggle must be attacked in every organization and in each attempt by workers and peasants to challenge capital and build alternatives. Whatever fights racism and patriarchy challenges the central features of the system: exploitation and expropriation. How can workers be organized if there are racial and gender tensions among those seeking representation by a union? How can a guerrilla war be won unless women are full participants? How can a workplace be egalitarian if homes are not? What good is a left-wing party if its leaders assault women with impunity?

It is an unworthy argument that race and gender are mere identities, whereas class is a social relationship. Writer and political analyst Richard Seymour puts it well when he says:

> To me, it's straightforward. Class is a social relationship that is structured by race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and a whole range of other determinations. Race is the modality in which millions of people inhabit their class experience. Their "identity politics" will often be the precise way in which they fight a class struggle. Black Lives Matter, a struggle against the racialized violence of the capitalist state, is an example of that, and it is of benefit to the whole working class if it succeeds. Now, what would be implied if we socialists were to write off such a movement, which has already had such an impact culturally? Surely it would be that at best we are purists who are incapable of intelligent political intervention in real-life situations, at worst that we subscribe to some spurious "color-blind" politics.
>
> What is more, "identity" is never as straightforward as a label. It is a process, "identification." To identify myself is to identify myself with others, to say who I am like, who I have interests in common with. Some identifications are potentially more expansive, more universal, than others. The identity of a black woman prisoner is more conducive to solidarity and radical change than that of a white Republican congressman.[48]

It is also wrong to claim that though race and gender are important, class is more so, and everything else must wait upon its resolution. This strategy is guaranteed never to face racism and patriarchy directly. It is true, for example, that if a U.S. union wins a fixed-dollar wage increase for all of the members of one of its bargaining units, Black workers and women will gain the most in percentage terms because they have been the lowest paid. But what does this do to change the culture of a union that has had a history of racism and patriarchy? It would do nothing to make the union's leadership less white and male or make white workers less racist and men less sexist in their behavior. Black workers had to take the Steelworkers' union to court to end the structural racism embedded in its negotiated seniority system.[49]

Nor will wage gains prevent a union from being less attentive to the grievances of Black and women workers. The same arguments apply to lesbian, gay, and trangsgender workers. During the late 1960s, Black automobile workers in Detroit formed the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), which later expanded into a more encompassing movement, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Black workers conducted wildcat strikes, but they also targeted their union, United Auto Workers (UAW), which had a stellar reputation as a supporter of the civil rights movement and was considered one of the most progressive labor unions in the nation. However, its commitment to Black members left much to be desired. Few within the UAW's leadership were Black, and the union did little to compel the companies not to discriminate against Black workers. DRUM and other Revolutionary Union Movement offshoots picketed UAW headquarters and began to agitate for a radical redress of Black grievances in the larger community.[50]

There have been left-wing movements worldwide for at least 150 years, yet racial and gender hierarchies are still with us. Just how powerful they are can be seen in those countries that have had socialist revolutions. In the USSR, there was a sense of gender and sexual liberation afoot after the 1917 revolution.[51] Led in part by

the Bolshevik Alexandra Kollantai, a radical reconceptualization of sexuality and gender started to emerge in the new society. Laws were enacted that decriminalized homosexuality, gave full social rights to those living together without marriage, freed women from legal servitude to their husbands, socialized childcare, made divorce routine, legalized abortion, and pioneered a new set of social welfare services provided by the state. Kollantai argued, correctly, "for the necessity of carrying out ideological struggle over the structure of gender and sexual relations simultaneously with the social and economic struggles." For her, these were class issues, which would seem obvious since it had been women workers and peasants, who by force or their numbers and economically inferior social position, were most adversely affected by the regressive gender relations of Russian societies before 1917.

Nothing like the Russian Revolution had ever happened in any country in the world. Yet, by the late 1920s and early 1930s, Joseph Stalin had taken control of the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet state. What Kollantai had fought for was reversed and abandoned. Women continued to make gains on the economic front; the country needed their labor. Within a few decades, women dominated such formerly male job preserves as medicine and engineering. But these advances have been reversed with the demise of the Soviet Union and the resurrection of the reactionary Orthodox Church.

Few countries have made more remarkable strides in combating structural racism than Cuba. Since the revolutionary forces gained control of the country in 1959, laws have been enacted ending all forms of racial discrimination. Efforts have been made to incorporate Black Cubans fully and equally into all elements of society, including the Communist Party and the government. Cuba's leading scholar of race, political economist Esteban Morales Domínguez, states: "Cuba is the only country in the world in which Blacks and mestizos have the state and the government as their ally. If there had not been a revolution, Blacks would have had to make one in order to reach the level that more than a few

of us have achieved."[52] He adds: "... we can argue that the black and mulatto population on the island is the most educated and healthy group of African descendants in this hemisphere and that no other country has done so much to eliminate racial injustice and discrimination as has Cuba."[53] Cuban military forces in southern Africa were critical to defeating apartheid in South Africa and colonialism in Angola.

Yet, the ellipsis I placed at the beginning of the last quote hides the words that begin it: "In spite of the racism that still exists in Cuban society . . ." After the Special Period that commenced with the end of the Soviet Union, which brought with it a focus on foreign tourism as a means to obtain foreign exchange, Black Cubans have faced discrimination and inequality. Those suffering most were Afro-Cubans. Cuba is still working hard to address problems of race. But if racial disparities exist there, nearly sixty years after the Revolution, and in a society willing to deal with them directly, then we can see how important it is to confront racism in all working-class struggles.

Ending racial and gender hierarchies is difficult, to say the least. Think of India's complex caste system, which combines enormous economic and social injustices that seem remarkably immune to solution.[54] There are concrete things that might be done regarding patriarchy and race. First, women and racial and ethnic groups have built hundreds of organizations and movements to liberate themselves. All workers and peasants should support these, but those who are white men must honor their independence and the leadership of those within them. Showing solidarity with oppressed groups is, as David Roediger argues, a more difficult task than we might imagine.[55] Capital creates differences within labor, and these get embedded in the system as a whole. So, forging alliances among groups with different identities is extremely difficult. Humility and a willingness to thrash out differences might go a long way toward building a unified working-class movement.

Second, in all labor unions and political parties, caucuses of women, racial and ethnic minorities, and those who are gay,

lesbian, and transgender ahould be encouraged and recognized where they already exist. All working-class organizations should have open spaces for free discussion and debate. The main goal is to address issues directly and forcefully. Don't sweep anything under the rug.

Third, as I said earlier in this chapter, make all the hierarchies within the working class central to the work of organizing, the functioning of every working-class entity, and the building of alternative ways of constructing the production, distribution, and reproduction of society. Mao Zedong said that developing collective relations of production was as important as increasing production, perhaps more so because only a culture of equality could unleash humanity's creative potential. Fourth, don't allow race and gender hierarchy struggles to be co-opted by mainstream politics. For example, the "Me Too" upsurge has focused mainly on famous men who have assaulted and demeaned women. However, most of the women who daily face male depredations are in the working class. That is where radical efforts should be concentrated, in the workplaces, homes, and communities where most women are exploited and their labor expropriated. In the United States, for example, it is unlikely that top labor leaders will press the issue of patriarchy with fervor. Women and male allies should press unions as hard as possible on this. All those who want to change the world should support every anti-racist and anti-patriarchy upheaval.

With its land thefts and attendant wars, imperialism has caused tens of millions to abandon their homelands and flee to other countries, often in the Global North. These immigrants have suffered every imaginable indignity: forced into squalid camps, robbed by unscrupulous people who "help" them get across the border; arrested by border police and kept in detention centers awaiting deportation; compelled to take the worst jobs while living in constant fear of arrest; always treated as second-class persons, even in countries that profess compassion for them.[56] A combination of racism and virulent nationalism has arisen worldwide,

fueled by neo-fascist political parties, causing still more brutal treatment of immigrants. In the United States, the administration of former president Donald Trump declared war on immigrants, even refusing asylum requests for women and children in danger of extreme violence in their home countries. It separated parents from children, placing the latter in thinly disguised concentration camps run by private enterprises.[57] Not much seems to have changed under the current U.S. president, Joe Biden.

Though many protests and other actions supporting immigrant rights have taken place, labor unions and labor political parties should do much more.[58] They should help fund immigrant rights groups and form their own. They should organize mass demonstrations at camp and detention center sites. They should picket the houses of politicians who have criminalized immigration. Principles of open borders and "No one is illegal" should appear on their banners. They should engage in the immigration education of their members. In the United States, immigrants have been one bright spot in the labor movement, joining unions and engaging in class struggle, whether they are documented or not.[59] They are far less likely to be criminals or terrorists than the native-born. This is a critically important matter. If the "We" means anything, it means embracing immigrants as our brothers and sisters. As a woman from whom we rented an apartment in Tucson said to us about Mexicans coming north, "But they're our neighbors." Indeed, they are.

Direct Action

It takes boldness and courage to attack capital. But attack we must. This system is a human disaster, and it proves itself every day to be incapable of satisfying our most basic needs. It has assaulted all aspects of life, including the metabolism of the earth. If it does not cease to exist, wealth will continue to flow to the top, and soon the richest handful of persons will own most of what everyone else depends upon for life. Work will continue to be an exercise in

misery. The exhortation to become ever more productive—or else! —will get louder, ringing in our ears until our minds and bodies are shipwrecked. Food supplies will become more contaminated and unfit to eat. Land thefts will accelerate. Rising temperatures will kill us or make us want to kill each other. Authoritarian, neofascist governments will become commonplace. Barbarism won't be the half of it.

If unions, peasant associations, and political entities are to work together to change the world, to bring an unalienating society into existence, then the motto of Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement must become the rallying cry for everyone: "*Occupy, Resist, Produce.*" Unions must resurrect the strike, which can still cripple production and disrupt the extraction of surplus value from the labor power of the working class. This is especially true in those sectors of the global economy tied together by complex but physically separated supply chains and sophisticated logistics. Railway workers, dockworkers who load and unload the giant container ships, sailors and others who work on ships, warehouse employees in the large logistics complexes near the world's large cities, communication workers, IT specialists, call center operators—these are workers whose efforts keep the flow of goods and services going. Rolling strikes by teachers, food workers, and sanitation employees can make capital tremble on as large a geographical scale as possible.

Immigrants around the globe, those who tend the crops, clean houses and hotel rooms, tend the lines in restaurant kitchens, build the houses, do the yard work, take care of people's plumbing, electrical, and mechanical needs, manicure hands and feet, and care for other people's children can strike, showing both their power and their indispensability and demanding that they be respected. One reason why unions must be democratic, with radical aims, is that, when they are, they are more likely to strike, picket (not just workplaces but the homes of their bosses, suppliers, and buyers), and boycott. And when they do, these will be effective because the members have taken control of their actions. The history of strikes

tells us this is so. Workers shouldn't have to relearn it, but they and society will be rewarded when they do.[60]

Rather than waste time voting for traditional political parties, believing that they can be pressured to the left, workers must confront the state directly. Neoliberalism has ravaged Argentina's working class, exacerbated by an economic collapse that began in 2001 and left much of the workforce unemployed or forced to labor in the informal economy. Traditional labor unions and political institutions embedded in a corporatist, capital-labor compromise were no longer relevant to those left behind. To organize themselves, unemployed workers and their allies began blocking local, regional, and national roads. They came to be known as *piqueteros*, the Spanish word for "picketers." They found that they could stall commerce and, in this way, stop the flow of profits just like wage workers do when they strike. Many groups were formed, some community-based, democratic, with informal education of members and attempts to produce goods and services. Although the participants eventually succumbed to internal disagreements among the left-wing parties that infiltrated them, government repression and concession, and exhaustion, they provide another example of the kind of organization that foreshadows a better future.[61]

Members of the Movement for Black Lives have taken to the streets of U.S. towns and cities for several years now, protesting continuing police violence against Black men, women, and children. In September 2017, protesters blocked streets in St. Louis to demand justice in yet another acquittal of a police murderer. Such actions, combined with a growing and sophisticated movement aimed at Black liberation, not only empower participants but make visible in a direct way the realities of Black lives in the United States. They bear witness, and they force the state to respond, either with further violence or concession. Combined with lawsuits and attempts to organize production in some places, these actions eschew ordinary politics and attack capital and state directly. In Greensboro, North Carolina, activists in the Black community, following in the footsteps of Occupy Wall Street, made a valiant

effort to gain ownership of an abandoned shopping mall, intending to start a group of worker-community cooperatives, including a grocery store. Many such efforts fail, like that of the Argentine *piqueteros*. Still, they serve a radical educational function and provide a base for building future forms of collective self-help and confrontation.[62]

These actions reflect the heritage of the Black Panther Party, which took seriously a duty to occupy, resist, and produce. The party initiated a remarkable number of collective self-help measures, providing services that poor communities could not get in the capitalist marketplace. "These programs eventually included the Free Breakfast for Children Program, liberation schools, free health clinics, the Free Food Distribution Program, the Free Clothing Program, child development centers, the Free Shoe Program, the Free Busing to Prison Program, the Sickle Cell Anemia Research Foundation, free housing cooperatives, the Free Pest Control Program, the Free Plumbing and Maintenance Program, renter's assistance, legal aid, the Seniors Escorts Program, and the Free Ambulance Program."[63]

Occupation is a direct action that can take various forms, but it typically involves efforts to retake the commons or convert private property into common property. Occupy Wall Street is a famous example. Beginning in Zuccotti Park in the Wall Street district of New York, in September 2011, it spread throughout the United States and the world.

> Public spaces were occupied; clashes with police ensued immediately; diverse discussions and debates took place; the movement spread rapidly across the nation and then the world; and millions of people were energized and made to feel part of something of great importance. Open-air classrooms scrutinized critical issues. People learned that they could make decisions and effectively organize daily life. Those camped out in Zuccotti secured food and shelter, took care of sanitation, and solved complex problems of logistics every day.[64]

Homeless people can occupy abandoned buildings or set up tent encampments in public spaces. Community groups can take over abandoned land for gardens. Workers can occupy closed factories. The act of occupation can lead to an arrangement with government authorities to sell the property at a nominal price or one in which the state turns a blind eye to the occupation. Again, we can have collective self-help at work.

In the case of Cuban agriculture, we have seen that the state can encourage and support working-class cooperation. To a lesser degree, this has been true in Venezuela as well. Even before Hugo Chavez became president, local associations in both rural and urban areas had begun to hold meetings of the people in a neighborhood or small geographical area to discuss common problems and their solutions. Chavez saw that such groups could be the foundation of participatory socialism. Control over society could eventually devolve to the working class, replacing the liberal democratic state that had proven incapable of meeting basic social needs. Thus were born the communal councils, of which there are now 47,000 in the country:

> A communal council is the assembly of a self-chosen territory. In urban areas it comprises 150–200 families or living units, in rural areas 20–30 and in indigenous areas, that are even less densely populated, 10–20, and they decide themselves what is the territory of the community. The communal council is the assembly of all people of the community that decides on all matters.
>
> The communal councils form workgroups for different issues, depending on their needs: infrastructure, water, sports, culture, etc., and these workgroups elaborate proposals that are then voted by the community assembly to establish what is more important. Then they get the projects financed through public institutions. The financing structure that was created was no longer attached to the representative institutions at a local level, which would have brought them into this direct, unequal competition. . . .

> Instead it was situated at a national or at least regional levels. And this created a possibility to have a more community-centered, more independent [council structure] . . .[65]

Funded projects have generated community-controlled enterprises, which can supply goods and services locally, be exchanged with similar entities in nearby territories, or sold in the marketplace. There are also some six thousand communes, which combine several councils and coordinate activities at a larger spatial level. There are difficulties of unequal power between councils and communes and between both of these and the state. They have been worsened by the economic crisis and attempts by U.S. imperialism to overthrow the Venezuelan government. The ideological climate in both councils and communes, however, has been one in which the "We" has taken hold, weakening the grip of the "I" on people's consciousness. This shift in thinking will make it difficult to overturn the positive steps that have been undertaken.

With both council and commune, as well as several attempts at worker control of factories, the working class, which, as always, includes peasants, we see an expansion of the commons, an assertion by those whose lives have been severely circumscribed by capital to take back what should have been theirs to begin with.[66]

Another example of the logic of "Occupy, Resist, Produce" has been taking place in the U.S. city of Jackson, Mississippi, and the surrounding area.[67] Control of land has been a recurring theme among Black dissidents. The Nation of Islam has farms in various parts of the United States that produce organic food. Some in the U.S. Communist Party argued that the "Black Belt" running across the southern United States constituted a nation that should be independent of the nation that had enslaved Black people. The Black Panther Party and Malcolm X stressed the need to control this most important means of production. To produce necessary goods, land is needed. Without it, how can any group be economically independent?

The movement in Jackson is called Cooperation Jackson (CJ), and it grew out of various efforts by Blacks to build a socialist community in the heart of U.S. capitalism. The rallying cry of the people who began Cooperation Jackson—one of the most notable of these was Black radical Chokwe Lumumba, who eventually became Jackson's mayor, something remarkable in its own right—was "Free the Land." After doing some preliminary organizing in the area, they acquired land and began to develop an ambitious plan of eco-socialist production, distribution, and education. In the South, global warming is going to inundate low-lying areas with water. This fact and the disaster in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina made these leaders grasp that any scheme that doesn't take ecology seriously cannot hope to change the world. Therefore, CJ maintained from the beginning that whatever they did had to be based upon the principle of sustaining the environment.

The CJ project has four goals: gaining Black working-class control of the means of production in Jackson and the area close to it; building and advancing the development of the ecologically regenerative forces of production; making the working class the agent of combining the means of production into socially useful outputs, and democratically transforming Jackson, and then the state of Mississippi, and outward to the entire South. CJ has started cooperatives: a cooperative school, a training center, a union, and a bank. Farms and grocery stores are an integral part of cooperative production. There is much more to CJ, including using technologies like 3D printers to make useful goods, the development of substantive political democracy following the model of Venezuela, and eco-friendly public infrastructure. The industrialization plan is particularly ambitious. It can be criticized as not feasible, but things will have to be made using one technology or another in any conceivable future. By beginning to conceptualize this and then implementing it, CJ will help show the way forward.

In all the examples in this section, education has been of paramount importance. Experts and novices learn from one another in non-hierarchical, collective settings. Radical education will be

critical for the struggle to terminate the rule of capital and built a different world. There has been much discussion recently about higher education in the United States, as racial and ethnic minorities, and especially women, have sought to pressure colleges and universities to become more inclusive. We should applaud these efforts, but as historian Robin D. G. Kelley points out, the university cannot be reformed by the simple addition of more Black, brown, and women teachers and students, more diversity training, and safe spaces. Institutions of higher learning are integral to the reproduction of capitalism and its multiple oppressions. It is possible to learn in them, but this learning should be used to subvert the colleges themselves, to supersede them. Take from these institutions what they offer and then build alternative forms of education in spaces controlled by the working class.[68]

Concerning labor education, working-class political parties and organizations began labor colleges in the first forty years of the twentieth century:

> In the United States, the Communist Party (CPUSA) began the New York Workers School in 1923 (later renamed the Jefferson School) and remained active in worker education until the Cold War assault on the left. The CPUSA also had schools throughout the country, including the California Labor School in the Bay Area. These saw as their purpose the development of a radical class consciousness among workers, and they tried to link theoretical knowledge of capitalism with practical efforts to construct a radical working-class culture. They conducted hundreds of classes for thousands of students, especially during and after the Second World War. The curriculum centered around Marxism, which was called the "science of society," but around this center there were courses on every imaginable subject: literature, art, drama, psychology, even dressing for success (this last had a class focus, aimed at both women who would be participating in their unions as leaders and immigrants and their children, who needed to know the norms of their new country).

Many of the instructors were top-notch scholars and artists. Dashiell Hammett taught a course on the mystery novel, for instance. All of the Party's schools were connected in one way or another to the labor movement, mainly to the left-led unions of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), some of whose leaders were either Party members or "fellow travelers."

There were other schools for worker education, for example the Brookwood Labor College, Work People's College, and the Highlander Folk School. All aimed to prepare workers for struggle, in their trade unions and in the larger society. Willing to ally themselves with supportive unions and nonsectarian in their admissions practices, they were committed to a radically liberal education. Interestingly, Local 189 of the Communication Workers of America, a contemporary union of labor educators (today, after a merger with the University and College Labor Education Association, it is the United Association for Labor Education or UALE), began as Local 189 of the American Federation of Teachers, which represented the faculty at Brookwood Labor College. Work People's College was begun by Finnish immigrants in Minnesota and later came under the sway of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which reopened the school in 2006. The Highlander Folk School is the most famous of these colleges, and it is still going strong as the Highlander Research and Education Center. One of its most famous students was Rosa Parks.[69]

Robin D. G. Kelley gives several examples of Black Americans educating themselves, not only about their oppression but about their rejection of and battles to end it and forge a better world. The Mississippi Freedom Schools of the early 1960s, whose students and teachers "didn't want equal opportunity in a burning house; they wanted to build a new house." The Black women of Mount Vernon, New York, who began an education program a few years later, "saw education as a vehicle for collective transformation and an incubator of knowledge, not a path to upward mobility and material

wealth." There have been independent Black schools and institutes, and numerous study groups started without much money but with a desire to, as Kelley puts it, "love, study, struggle."[70]

Final Words

The implication of everything said in this book is that the working class *must* change the world. There is no choice. The long rule of capital has created profoundly alienated conditions for nearly all of humanity. Despite creating unimaginable quantities of goods and services, capitalism has never managed to ensure that these are distributed with even a tolerable degree of equality. Today, the combined wealth of eight billionaires is as great as the total wealth of half the people in the world.[71] After several hundred years, there are still several billion people existing on the brink of economic ruin. Work is still hell for all but a few. Today it is a rare person who has not lived through war, and the greatest imperial power, the United States, is waging war in scores of countries and has subjected several to absolute ruin. Capital has even managed to upend Earth's metabolism, generating manifold disasters that might soon make our planet largely uninhabitable. If we are to recover our humanness somehow and reverse course, the working class will *have* to change the world. Capital will never do it, nor will the relatively well-off middle class of small-scale businesspersons and professionals. Only the working class, with its vast numbers and potential power, can get the job done.

Here in this last chapter, I have offered some ideas about how the world can begin anew. My argument can be summed up in a few words. Only radical thinking and acting have any chance of staving off higher and higher levels of barbarism. Newer instruments must be forged: radically democratic labor unions and political parties, a scaling-up of collective self-help activities, massive levels of "Occupy, Resist, Produce." The old ways have failed. Traditional labor unions and social democratic politics are now irrelevant in that they will never bring about radical social transformation. So

too are mainstream environmental groups, the non-governmental organizations that have proliferated like invasive species, and the plethora of liberal feminist and ethnic and racial advocacy associations. Their stakes are all too tied to the bourgeois order of things; mainly, they all want just a slightly larger share of the pie. The pie and how it came to be are matters that sail over their heads in terms of understanding.

We cannot afford to settle for incremental changes that, even if they happen, never amount to what is qualitatively and radically different, and can soon enough be reversed and usually are. To believe otherwise is surely utopian. The radical upending of the social order is now hardheaded realism, the only path forward. No doubt, it might already be too late. It will take time for a class riven with so many fundamental cleavages, by race/ethnicity and gender most importantly, to unify itself and destroy its class enemy. Mother Earth may take her revenge on us before that. In the meantime, though, best to do what we can, in whatever ways we are capable: by any and all tactics, everywhere, all the time, in every part of the capitalist system. Fight landlords, disrupt classrooms, take on bosses, write for and with the working class; nothing is unimportant. And as we do this, remember that those who have suffered the most—workers and peasants in the Global South, minorities in the Global North, working-class women everywhere—are going to lead struggles, or they are likely to fail.

Regarding work, the subject of this book, we should strive for a society in which this word is no longer used except to describe the past. What we are, as human beings, is a species that can thoughtfully produce what is needed for survival and enjoyment. There should be no workers, no wages, no bosses, no capitalists, no panopticon—only cooperative and beneficial production, with substantive equality in all aspects of life. Instead of becoming habituated to misery, exploitation, and expropriation, we will take for granted that most profound maxim: From each according to ability, to each according to need. When this necessity is realized, only then will we be free.

Postface

If we are to create a new world without work as we know it, production will have to become more localized, smaller-scale, and aimed at serving the needs of medium-sized geographical areas. If, for example, land was radically redistributed and regenerative farming became the norm, a couple billion peasants and farmworkers could engage in the production of healthy food without destroying the earth's metabolism or the interface between the metabolism of nature and human beings. In addition, food production could absorb millions of workers now engaged in meaningless and alienated labor. The tools and machinery necessary for farming could be produced collectively by teams of trained craftspersons, and these could be built to reinforce the new relations of production. The distribution of food would also require labor power. We have enough examples globally to know that these things can be done.[1]

Some on the left argue that all we need to do to build a socialist system of production and distribution is socialize existing capitalist enterprises. A perusal of *Jacobin* magazine will provide examples of this argument. However, capitalist businesses have arisen and grown based on endlessly accumulating capital. Their

every aspect is geared toward this goal. This includes the technology. For example, the machinery used in industrial farming will be completely inapplicable to an ecosocialist agriculture. The same will be true for the way in which land is used. Similarly, whatever transportation vehicles a new society decides to produce, the now dominant system of assembly lines and the lean production control now mandatory will no longer be of any use.

In the late 1980s, Swedish vehicle manufacturer Volvo experimented with eliminating assembly lines. Together with a strong labor union, the company began to organize production with collaborative teams of workers that would perform a task or a set of tasks from beginning to end.

> Production teams learned every aspect of car, truck, or bus production, working with engineers and then making the products collectively without an assembly line. This is what Volvo and the automobile workers' union did at a plant in Uddevalla, Sweden. Teams of employees performed a variety of tasks in pre-assembly stations, and then the partly assembled cars were moved by conveying devices to be finally assembled, again by work groups. Alienation fell, and productivity rose.[2]

The plant was profitable and showed high worker satisfaction and productivity. Ultimately, however, it was not profitable enough to withstand severe competitive pressures in a period of market turbulence. But this is all the more reason to believe that in a non-capitalist system, such innovations will be successful from society's perspective.

If we are serious about the need to radically change how we labor, then existing labor unions and political parties must put the nature of work on their agendas. They should begin now to use the often large sums of money at their disposal to finance ecosocialist production, including the training of those who will be responsible for production. Making necessary products, rehabilitating old buildings, growing food, supplying services—there is no limit to

what could be done. Time is short, and there is no reason to delay what is possible.

Notes

Preface

1. For an interesting inquiry into the nature of work, see Raymond Geuss, *A Philosopher Looks at Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). I thank my friend Sayres Rudy for sending me a copy of this book.
2. Jeremy Seabrook, "The Language of Labouring Reveals Its Tortured Roots," *The Guardian*, January 14, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jan/14/language-labouring-reveals-tortured-roots1.

2. Introduction

1. See Eric Schutz, *Inequality, Class, and Economics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2022).
2. For a fuller account of surplus value, see Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012).
3. See Michael D. Yates, *In and Out of the Working Class* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2009).

1. Take This Job and . . .

1. Gad Levanon, Amy Lui Abel, Allen Li, and Calvin Rong, *Job Satisfaction 2021: Job satisfaction remains high even in the midst of the pandemic and economic chaos*, the Conference Board, https://conference-board.org/pdfdownload.cfm?masterProductID=27278.
2. Michael D. Yates, *Can the Working Class Change the World?* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018), 24.

3. Ibid., 151.
4. Ben Hamper, *Rivethead: Tales from the Assembly Line* (New York: Warner Books, 1991).
5. See U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Automotive Industry: Employment, Earnings, and Hours, https://www.bls.gov/iag/tgs/iagauto.htm. There are upward of 14 million employees in the automotive sector worldwide. See International Labour Organization, *The future of work in the automotive industry: The need to invest in people's capabilities and decent and sustainable work*, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_741659.pdf.
6. Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter, *Choosing Sides: Unions and the Team Concept* (Boston: South End Press, 1988).

2. Labor Markets: The Neoclassical Dogma

1. Michael D. Yates, *Naming the System: Inequality and Work in the Global Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003), 123.
2. Michael D. Yates, "Markets Are the Problem (Not the Solution)," *Truthout.org*, April 16, 2014, https://truthout.org/articles/markets-are-the-problem-not-the-solution/. Kunkel's comment can be found at https://www.salon.com/chromeo/article/tea_partys_absurd_socialism_obsession_an_actual_marxist_sounds_off/.
3. Michael D. Yates, "Your Economics Professor Is Almost Certainly a Charlatan: A Review with Commentary of *My Mis-Education in 3 Graphics*," a film by Mary Filippo. See https://my-mis-education-in-3-graphics.org/.
4. The phrase "dismal science" was coined by Scottish historian and philosopher Thomas Carlyle. There is debate about why economics is a "dismal science," but given how economists have rationalized every kind of human misery, it may be an understatement to declare it dismal. Certainly, many of its practitioners are a dismal lot.
5. See John Ifcher and Homa Zarghamee, "The rapid evolution of homo economicus: Brief exposure to neoclassical assumptions increases self-interested behavior," *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics* 75 (August 2018): 55–65.
6. David Card and Alan B. Krueger, *Myth and Measurement: The New Economics of the Minimum Wage*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).
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6. A Divided Working Class

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